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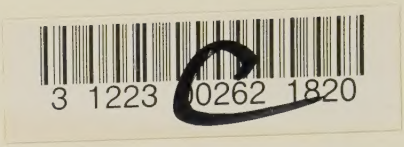
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LÉOPOLD FIRST

THE FOUNDER OF MODERN BELGIUM

LÉOPOLD FIRST, KING OF THE BELGIANS
(*After a Painting in the Musée at Brussels*)

LÉOPOLD FIRST

The Founder of Modern Belgium

BY

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AND

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TO

HIS MAJESTY ALBERT I

THE THIRD OF A SPLENDID
LINE OF KINGS

INTRODUCTION

BELGIUM has been celebrating in 1930 the centennial of her independence. The significance of Belgian independence should be no secret to the English-speaking world. We came to a sudden realization of it in August, 1914. Our hearts were warmed by the spectacle of her brave resistance to invasion and chilled by the probable consequences of that invasion's success. Then the war ended and Belgium dropped out of sight. She became just another of those little countries with which Europe is infested. And yet Belgian independence means just what it has meant for a hundred years. The events of 1914 did not make the importance of Belgium, they only proved it. A small strategic wedge driven in between England, France, and Germany, what is now Belgium has been for many centuries a corridor of commerce and war. Her independence means security for all her neighbors. The stricken and bleeding Belgium of 1914 was more dramatic but no more an object of intelligent solicitude than the marvelously restored Belgium which has been displaying its prosperity in this year's expositions at Antwerp and Liége. To know Europe one must know Belgium: this is as true of present politics as it is of medieval art.

Two among the institutions of Belgium stand out as extraordinary achievements—her Constitution and her kingship. The Belgian Constitution, next to that of the

United States, ranks first among written constitutions for duration and success in operation. It was enacted in 1831, and is the oldest constitution now in force in any European State. Any such document in the nature of a fundamental law which can boast of a century of existence without being cracked to pieces or warped out of all semblance to the original is worthy of the deepest respect.

The Belgian Constitution, indeed, is much more modern in spirit than the Constitution of the United States. The latter is an eighteenth-century document and established a form of government based upon the English conception of constitutional monarchy in that period. The President is an eighteenth-century king without his crown. The Belgian Constitution, on the other hand, adopted the English system of the nineteenth century. It was the first instrument by which the principle of ministerial responsibility was permanently established outside of its Mother England. The Congress which framed the Constitution provided for a Senate, composed of large property-owners, and a Chamber of Representatives elected by a limited number of taxpayers. These features have since been thoroughly democratized. It gave the judges life tenure and established trial by jury.

The Belgian Constitution is notable, too, for providing better protection of private rights against executive aggression than any other constitution except that of the United States. It dealt with these rights objectively. "They correspond closely in subject-matter to the Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1791. Belief in the existence of these rights and in the duty of government to protect them was, indeed, the common property of all enlightened men in 1830. The Belgian Constitution, how-

ever, made no abstract declaration of these rights. It simply forbade, as do our American constitutions in like case, acts which might interfere with their exercise. . . . For example: 'No man can be prosecuted except as provided by law and in accordance with the forms which it prescribes.' 'Except in cases of flagrant crime, no one can be arrested except by virtue of a motived order of a judge.' 'No one can be removed against his will from the judge whom the law assigns him.' 'No penalty can be established or implied except by virtue of a law.' 'No domiciliary visit can take place except in the cases provided by law and in accordance with the forms it prescribes.' 'No one can be deprived of his property except for public purposes, in the cases and manner established by law, and after the payment of a just indemnity.' 'No tax to the profit of the state can be established except by law.' . . .

"Especially thorough is the constitutional protection thrown around liberty of opinion. Article 14 of the Constitution reads: 'Liberty of worship and of its public practice, as well as the liberty of manifesting one's opinions in every matter, are guaranteed, provided that crimes committed through the use of these liberties may be repressed.' Then follow several articles dealing in detail with religion, education, the press, assemblies, petitions and associations. The general principle underlying these provisions is that of prohibiting all preventive measures, such as censorship or preliminary authorization under any guise. The individual is unlimited in his initiative, but responsible before the law for the acts which he commits. This situation, which we regard in

America as a matter of course, is highly exceptional, even at this day, on the continent of Europe." [1]

As to the kingship, it is no exaggeration to say that it has proved the most notable kingship of modern times. The reigns of but three kings of more than ordinary ability and force of character have spanned the century. Where else can be found a century of royal leadership such as theirs? The English Crown has become little more than the visible embodiment of national sentiment —a sort of human flag. In Belgium the King still exercises, without derogating from the principle of cabinet responsibility, an often decisive influence on public affairs. This is due in part to the fact that the King presides at cabinet meetings and in part to the fact that all Belgium's three kings have been men of exceptional capacity. In "Léopold of the Belgians" Count de Lichtervelde gave us a picture of the Belgian system in full operation under the guidance of the brilliant, persistent, and self-willed Léopold II. In the present volume he portrays the beginnings of the Belgian State presided over by the wise, well-trained, supple diplomat and statesman Léopold I. There can be no doubt that history judges him one of the greatest European politicians of his day. He brought to the performance of his task a magnificent appearance, great personal charm, and an acute mind filled with the experiences of the most exciting era in modern history. He is worth knowing about for himself, for his services to European peace, and for the contribution he made to the establishment of Belgian institutions.

It is impossible here to attempt to acknowledge all the sources from which we have derived our real inspiration

[1] Reed, T. H., "Government and Politics of Belgium," pp. 24-26.

since undertaking this translation. We might properly be charged with ingratitude, however, if we did not express our thanks to Julia R. Reed for many helpful suggestions in the preparation of the manuscript and to Lyle R. Chubb for his work on the proofs. It is to the generosity and public spirit of Mr. William Hallam Tuck, Brussels, that the public is indebted for the opportunity to read in English this life of the founder of modern Belgium. The translators wish, further, to assume full responsibility for the first chapter which they have added to de Lichtervelde's work to give English-speaking readers a background for Léopold's career as King of the Belgians.

THOMAS H. REED
H. RUSSELL REED

Ann Arbor, Michigan
October 4, 1930

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Background	3
II	The Arrival in Belgium	13
III	The Ten Days' War	37
IV	After the Defeat	57
V	The First Elections	68
VI	The Beginnings of Parliamentary Life	77
VII	The End of the Ministry of 1832	103
VIII	The Royal Guardian	124
IX	Strengthening the Dynasty	146
X	Dismemberment of Belgium	159
XI	The Decline of the Catholic-Liberal Entente	187
XII	The Victory of 1848	213
XIII	The Crown above Parties	225
XIV	The Crisis of 1857	247
XV	Foreign Policy	263
XVI	Internal Struggles	294
XVII	The Death of Léopold I	313
	Index	327

LÉOPOLD FIRST
THE FOUNDER OF MODERN BELGIUM

HOLLAND
GERMAN EMPIRE
ZEELAND
DUTCH LIMBURG
TURNHOUT
OSTEND
BRUGES
SCHELDT R.
ANTWERP
GHEEL
MOLL
LA PANNE
YSER R.
DUNKIRK
FURNES
LIERRE
WESTERLOO
NETHE R.
BREE
MESEYCK
W E S T
E A S T
GHENT
BEVERLOO
L I M B U R G
MALINES
OYLE R.
AERSCHOT
DIEST
ZONHOVEN
ROULERS
F L A N D E R S
ALOST
HASSELT
CALAIS
LAEKEN
LOUVAIN
MAESTRICHT
F L A N D E R S
YPRES
ASSCHE
BRUSSELS
TIRLEMONT
ST. TROND
COURTRAI
B R A B A N T
TONGRES
AIX-LA-CHAPELLE
LYS R.
LILLE
TOURNAI
NIVELLES
LIEGE
B E L G I U M
VERVIERS
NAMUR
MEUSE R.
HUY
SPA
MONS
CHARLEROI
SAMBRE R.
N A M U R
DINANT
OURTHE R.
CHATEAU D'ARDENNE (HOUYET)
VONÊCHE
L U X E M B U R G
BASTOGNE
GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBURG
BOUILLON
FLORENVILLE
SEMOIS R.
ARLON
MOSELLE R.
SEDAN
MEUSE R.
LUXEMBURG
F R A N C E

Chapter I

THE BACKGROUND

THE rise of a man from small beginnings to wealth and power, through the exercise of brilliant personal qualities, is interesting. When such a career is identified with the foundation of a vigorous and progressive State, it is significant. "The handsomest young man I have ever seen at the Tuileries," was Napoleon's comment on the youthful Léopold of Saxe-Coburg.[1] "That his mature career was the incarnation of constitutional monarchy" is the judgment pronounced by the great historian Henri Pirenne.[2] Between the dashing cavalier whom Napoleon wished to make his aide-de-camp and the astute, wary, indefatigable king who piloted Belgium through the storms of her revolutionary beginnings there were twenty years of grief, experience, and disillusionment. He never ceased, however, to be a romantic figure. To the end of his reign he was scanning the world for adventure, dreaming of a colonial empire for his little country. He was in age, as in youth, keenly human and irresistibly charming.

Léopold was born on December 16, 1790, the eighth child and third son of a petty German princeling who ruled over less than eighteen square miles of territory

[1] Comte de Las Cases, "Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène" (Paris, 1823), Vol. VII, p. 158.

[2] Baron Camille Buffin, "La Jeunesse de Léopold I^er" (Bruxelles, 1914), Preface, p. VI.

and only fifty-seven thousand subjects. The little duchy was loaded with debt, and the campaigns and policies of Napoleon put its very existence in constant peril. The eldest son, Ernest, succeeded to the title in 1806 and, until the fall of Napoleon, led a precarious career, constantly assisted by the precocious administrative and diplomatic skill of the youthful Léopold. With the first news of the debacle of the Russian expedition, the two brothers took an active part in the formation of the coalition against Napoleon. In the campaigns of 1813 and 1814, Léopold showed creditable dash and skill as a cavalry leader in the Russian Army and entered Paris in triumph.

Not by war, however, but by marriage, was made the fortune of the house of Saxe-Coburg. Well born, good-looking, and well brought up, the princes and princesses of the family were in matrimonial demand. Ferdinand, the second son, married the Princess Koháry, the richest heiress of Austria; Julienne became the wife of Grand Duke Constantine. Marie-Louise-Victoire was married first to the Prince of Leiningen, then, after his death, to Edward, Duke of Kent, and became the mother of Queen Victoria. Léopold himself, in 1816, married Princess Charlotte, only legitimate child of the Prince of Wales, afterward George IV.

The Princess had already been affianced (June 10, 1814) to the Prince of Orange, later the unsuccessful rival of Léopold for the crown of Belgium. On the sixteenth Charlotte broke the engagement. Just what happened is not precisely known. Léopold had been taken to London in the suite of the Emperor Alexander, and early in June had been presented to Charlotte. His beauty, the

charm of his manners and of his conversation made a profound impression on her. The pair were soon in love, but Léopold, too careful to risk the wrath of her father, delayed asking for her hand. In the end George gave his consent to their marriage and the young couple enjoyed a year of apparently idyllic happiness. Léopold was exalted with the prospect of guiding, as consort, the destiny of the world's greatest empire. The dream was short. In November, 1817, the Princess, after prolonged agony, was delivered of a still-born child and died.

Léopold was desolate. He had lost at once a cherished wife and a great future. He continued to live at Carleton House with his friend Stockmar, whose memoirs have shed light on the period. Under the terms of the marriage contract, he had an allowance of fifty thousand pounds a year—a sufficient contrast to the comparative poverty of earlier youth. He was a prominent figure in the social life of the time. In the disturbed period which preceded parliamentary reform, there were frequent whispers of some great part he might play in British politics. Such rumors, of course, had no foundation. In his late wife's country there was no field of activity for his talent, industry, and ambition. He was not even a member of the English royal family, but a mere pensioner of the State, doomed to perpetual inaction.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when Greece, having won its autonomy from the Turk, expressed a preference for Léopold as sovereign prince, he was deeply interested and gave a tentative assent. After long negotiations, however, because the powers would not agree to fix the boundary between Greece and Turkey as, in justice to Greece and in accord with the desires of the

Greek people, he believed it should be, he refused the throne. He would have no part in imposing on the Greeks a condition repugnant to them that in his opinion would make permanent peace impossible. He thus gave up a romantic adventure which deeply appealed to his nature and which might have had important results upon the history of the nineteenth century. A year later, on June 4, 1831, he became King of the Belgians.

When Léopold resigned all claims to the throne of Greece, on May 21, 1830, there was in the political sense no Belgium. The term "Belgians" had been for some time used to designate the people of the southern Low Countries, much more commonly referred to as the Spanish or Austrian Netherlands. The Pays Bas as a whole had belonged to the Burgundian power built up by Philip the Good, and had passed to the Hapsburgs through the marriage of the Archduke Rudolph to Mary, daughter and heiress of Charles the Bold. Upon the distribution of the possessions of the Emperor Charles V, the Netherlands passed to the Spanish Crown. When, shortly, the northern provinces established their independence, under the leadership of William the Silent, the southern, or Belgian, provinces remained under Spanish domination until transferred to Austria in 1715.

During the Austrian and Spanish periods Belgium was almost constantly overrun by invading armies. Every general European war was fought largely on her territory, and she was the victim of endless sieges, sacks, and spoliations. Conquered by France in the early years of the Revolution and made with the Prince-Bishopric of Liége an integral part of the French Republic, Belgium was profoundly influenced by the constructive legislation

of the period. But the Belgian people, despite all their difficulties, had retained a spirit of independence which welcomed the allies of 1814 as deliverers from the French.

Their satisfaction, however, was short-lived. The Congress of Vienna was impressed with the strategic importance of Belgium as the cross-roads of Europe and its almost inevitable battle-ground. Belgium escaped devastation in the wars of Napoleon because Napoleon began his campaigns against Russia and Prussia with the inestimable advantage of possessing it. Deprived of it, he fought in it his last fatal campaign. The Congress of Vienna was desirous of curbing France, as a hundred years later the Versailles conference was of curbing Germany. Castlereagh and Wellington had the idea that this might be done in part by establishing a strong buffer State between France and Prussia. Castlereagh therefore proposed and the Congress of Vienna accepted the plan to unite the northern and southern Netherlands into a single kingdom under William of Orange-Nassau.

There were important advantages in such a union, in addition to the contribution the new State might make to the maintenance of European equilibrium. Chief among them was that derived from the natural economic unity of the Low Countries, already realized under the Napoleonic régime. The Belgian cities which had shrunk to comparative insignificance under Spanish and Austrian rule had made great strides toward prosperity when their natural outlets through the Scheldt and the Dutch cities to the north were opened to them. A good half of the Belgians were in race and language virtually one with the Dutch. The united country was endowed with a

reasonably liberal Constitution and began its life under the protection of the powers.

Serious grounds of disagreement between the two peoples, however, were aggravated by the aggressive and tactless conduct of King William. Holland and the King were Protestant. Belgium was Catholic. Moreover, the portion of the Belgian people allied to the Dutch in race and language was—as it still is—most profoundly Catholic. There were in those days no such phrases as "universal suffrage" and "universal education." Only a fraction of the people possessed political privileges or was politically conscious. The Belgians who might aspire to any part in the management of the country were French in language and culture; to them the men of Amsterdam and The Hague were foreigners.

A discreet monarch might have succeeded in reconciling the diverse elements of these people, but William's hand was heavy. He gave a disproportionate number of posts, both military and civil, to his Dutch subjects; Dutch officials set to direct affairs in Belgian cities offended the susceptibilities of the French-speaking élite. He angered the liberal, free-thinking element among them by ignoring the provisions of the Constitution, which guaranteed civil liberties. He frightened and enraged the Catholic clergy and their faithful adherents by interfering in matters of education, even in the education of priests.

In the summer of 1830 revolt was in the air throughout Europe. In July the French toppled the last reactionary Bourbon from his throne and installed Louis-Philippe with the English parliamentary system and liberalized middle-class franchise. Riots broke out in Brussels in September and before William could collect his

forces Belgium had asserted its independence and banished Dutch authority. The army was disorganized by the defection of its Belgian contingent and what was little more than a mob of citizens in blue blouses drove it back from Brussels and freed most of the country from the invader.

A Provisional Government was organized which declared the independence of Belgium and arranged for the election of a National Congress. The Congress promptly declared all members of the house of Orange-Nassau incapable of reigning in Belgium and settled down to the drafting of a Constitution which has remained a monument to its liberality and constructive statesmanship. It is now the oldest written constitution in Europe and certainly one of the most successful. It extended exceptional protection to personal and civil rights, and attempted to set up the relationship between king and parliament which England was still evolving and which the July Revolution had just precariously established in France.

While the National Congress pursued its deliberations the fate of the infant State trembled in the balance. After the repulse of his army King William appealed to the powers to intervene to restore his revolted provinces to order. The circumstances, however, were not favorable for carrying out the avowed principles of the Holy Alliance. England, having all along resisted the application of the principle of intervention as interpreted by Metternich, unequivocally declined to intervene by force. Louis-Philippe, monarch by right of revolution, whose people had acclaimed the rise of the Belgian patriots, was clearly committed to resist intervention to reduce them to subjection. He was not slow to notify Russia and Prussia

that he would regard the sending of troops into Belgium as a casus belli. Austria's hands were tied by troubles in her Italian provinces. When, therefore, England announced a conference at London for the purpose of adjusting matters in the dismembered Netherlands, the other powers more or less willingly acquiesced. And at the moment when the Congress had almost precipitated a general war by its reaffirmation of Belgian independence and its rejection of the house of Orange-Nassau, the Poles seized the occasion to launch an insurrection which kept Russia, Austria, and Prussia fully occupied until the Belgian crisis was past.

The London Conference first secured a suspension of arms which put an end to actual hostilities and left the Belgians in peaceful possession of their country. This was soon followed by the protocol of December 20, 1830, which recognized the independence of Belgium, and that of January 20, 1831, which proclaimed its perpetual neutrality. In all these proceedings the conference defined the territory of Holland as that of 1790, all the rest of the Kingdom of the Netherlands going to Belgium. But this did not satisfy the Belgians, who continued to claim the territory on the left bank of the Scheldt to its mouth, and the whole of Luxemburg [3] and Limburg, which had taken part in the Revolution and were actually under Belgian control and represented in the National Congress. The so-called Treaty of the XVIII Articles (June 26, 1831) apparently left open to negotiation the question of Luxemburg and the other territories in dispute. Following the renewal of war between Belgium and Holland, in

[3] Luxemburg: a grand duchy of which William was the hereditary sovereign, and a member of the Germanic Confederation.

1831, the powers finally settled these questions in the so-called Treaty of the XXIV Articles (October 14, 1831) by giving Belgium the Walloon part of Luxemburg—about three fifths of the whole—and by ascribing to Holland the northeastern portions of Limburg, including the town and fortress of Maestricht. The solution was only protestingly accepted by Belgium, and was the occasion of much recrimination both before and after the fact.

Closely associated with the recognition of the Belgian State and the settlement of its boundaries was the choice of a ruler. In the beginning, England favored the candidacy of the Prince of Orange, eldest son of King William, which would have brought the two crowns ultimately together on the same head. Russia, Austria, and Prussia were of like mind. France was bitterly opposed, and the National Congress expressed the unalterable hostility of Belgium to the plan.

There was no dearth of other candidates. The Duke of Nemours, second son of Louis-Philippe, was supported by a strong faction in the Congress and by an active party in the country. Prince Otho of Bavaria, Prince Charles of Naples, Léopold of Saxe-Coburg, and several others had their supporters. Next to the Duke of Nemours, however, the most popular candidate appeared to be the Duke of Leuchtenberg, son of Eugène de Beauharnais and the Princess Amelia of Bavaria. This heir of the Napoleonic tradition was peculiarly objectionable to Louis-Philippe. To get rid of his dangerous candidacy the French Foreign Office allowed the Belgians to assume that Louis-Philippe would sanction the election of his son. Whereupon the Congress chose the Duke of Nemours King of the Belgians, by 95 votes to 75 given

to Leuchtenberg. In the face of the protests of the powers, Louis-Philippe refused for his son the proffered honor, as he had known all along he would have to do, but received in compensation their assurance that none of them would recognize the Duke of Leuchtenberg if he were elected King.

Under the circumstances, the Congress established a regency and named an honest and respectable but sufficiently weak old man, Surlet de Chokier, as Regent, The country rapidly fell into disorder. Orangist plots gained headway and, to offset them, counter-associations were formed which were guilty of regrettable actions. In the cabinet of the Regent, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joseph Lebeau, was a man of courage and decision. Surveying the field of possible candidates, he found in Léopold by far the best combination of qualities. England and the other powers were still supporting the cause of the Prince of Orange as the sole means of checking the drift of Belgium to France. Lebeau sought a rapprochement with England. He proposed the name of Léopold to the English agent, Lord Ponsonby. The suggestion met with favor. France even indicated a reluctant acceptance of this "English" prince as the least of evils.

Then followed several months of negotiations, in which Léopold quietly exerted his influence in behalf first of Belgium's territorial claims and finally to induce Belgium to accept the terms of the XVIII Articles. On June 4, by 152 out of 196 votes, the Congress elected him King of the Belgians.

Chapter II

THE ARRIVAL IN BELGIUM

On Saturday, July 16, 1831, in the early afternoon, Prince Léopold of Saxe-Coburg left England, to take possession of the Belgian throne to which the National Congress had called him. The Belgian Revolution had made its peace with the great powers by accepting the XVIII Articles of the Conference of London. The new State, situated in one of the storm-centers of the Continent, appeared, under the régime of permanent neutrality, to be an essential part of the European system; and the Prince, by his discreet but influential action in the final negotiations which fixed the international status of his adopted country, had truly become the connecting link between her and the powers whose good-will must be won. The general European situation, which had been violently troubled since the fall of the Bourbons and the Belgian insurrection, was becoming once more serene. Léopold, chosen by the Congress, strongly upheld by England, and accepted with good grace by France, promised order in Belgium and peace in Europe.

Since the death, in 1817, of the Princess Charlotte, Léopold had occupied an anomalous position, powerless in the midst of the intrigues of a divided family. The hour had come for an ambitious person of his temper, who, as he himself expressed it, looked at power from

the philosophic angle, to try his own luck and draw his own furrow. That he was glad to risk the hazards of the venture into kingship is certain. Yet his emotions on leaving England were not unmixed with sadness. At forty he was giving up security, ease, and fifty thousand pounds a year, to begin a new life in a country he did not know, where he had no personal relations, no party, no friends. He was breaking with dear memories. On the eve of his departure he bade a melancholy farewell to Claremont, the beautiful home where he had known so many happy days and to which his heart was to remain always true. He dismissed, too, his English household, retaining in his service only an aide-de-camp and a few servants. A young Belgian, Jules van Praet, destined to live henceforward in his shadow, became his private secretary and counselor in the new world he was entering.

At the boat Léopold was met by a delegation from the National Congress, among them Joseph Lebeau, the real creator of the political combination which was bringing him to Brussels, and the voyage to Calais was begun. The Prince had decided to land at Calais rather than at Ostend, so as to arrive in Belgium under the apparent patronage of both the powers which favored the new kingdom. The maintenance of understanding with them both was essential to the success of the enterprise; and Léopold, who had just missed becoming Prince Consort, husband of the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, now had to execute a discreet change of front.

Formerly, as a German princeling, he had waged war against Napoleon and had entered Paris joyously among the victors of 1814. His election to the throne of Belgium was very clearly a guaranty to Europe against the too

exclusive influence of France. Now that Léopold had become, in the conventional language of diplomacy, the *bon frère* of King Louis-Philippe, he had to do something to make people forget his Germanic origin and his military past. Already he perceived that reasons of state made it his duty to take a wife from the house of Orléans, and at his last soirée in London he had discussed this project with old Prince de Talleyrand, whom he had known at the court of Napoleon and found again, grown gray in intrigue, as ambassador of the July Monarchy at the court of England.

On the dock at Calais, while the cannon of Fort Rouge thundered, General Belliard, a veteran of the Empire, received the Prince of Saxe-Coburg in the name of the King of the French. This officer had formerly commanded French troops in Belgium and had fought against his guest. Events had now made him a diplomat and he was representing at Brussels, with distinction, the Government of Louis-Philippe. Once on shore, Léopold, taking up his proper rôle, received the French authorities at the Hôtel Dessain and showered attentions upon his new friends. King of a revolution, he regaled, as was proper, the officers of the National Guard. Quick to recognize useful influences, he took care to write Mme. Adélaïde, the Egeria of the royal palace, a letter, *bonne et excellente,*[1] as she described it.

The vicissitudes of his early youth had brought Léopold into intimate relation with many of the courts of Europe. He had done his part on the battle-field. The decisive years of his young manhood had been passed

[1] Talleyrand, "Mémoires," Vol. IV, p. 252.

with the real conquerors of France, in close touch with the best political minds of his time. To his early acquaintance, in Germany, with Metternich, Stein, and Hardenberg, he had added contact in England with Castlereagh, Wellington, Canning, and Palmerston. He was sufficiently of the old régime to belong still to that lettered and polished aristocracy which, under the influence of French culture, formed a living link between peoples. He had, however, during the eventful years of his youth, cast off the narrow prejudices and vanity of his caste. A very handsome and accomplished gentleman, his education was as broad as his personality was charming. Van Praet wrote after a first interview:

> The Prince is tall, lean, pale. He has a cold and sad yet rather sensitive air. One would judge him to be older than he is. His face is that of one who has suffered. He resembles his portrait strongly, only older and thinner. He will be a handsome king, with beautiful manners. He speaks French slowly, with some difficulty and with a rather pronounced German accent, but without mistakes.[2]

Of Belgium, where he was about to reign, he had hardly more than book knowledge. He had crossed the country in 1816, on his way to London via Liége and Brussels; he had returned in 1829, in the course of a long tour of Europe. Since his candidacy for the throne, he had studied the history of Belgium and meditated on the constant rules which determined her politics. At London he had met the members of the various missions sent by the Congress—MM. Van de Weyer, Count de Merode, de Brouckere, Vilain XIV, Count d'Arschot, the Abbé

[2] Buffin, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

de Foere, Fleussu, de Gerlache, d'Hoogvorst, de Muelenaere, van Praet, Devaux, and above all Nothomb. He had just made the acquaintance of Joseph Lebeau, whose spirit and ability had smoothed the way for him.

These associations, brief as they were, had not been useless to a mind like his, naturally curious, observant, and practical. Furthermore, the Prince had had at his side, in the capacity of intimate adviser, one of the most curious personalities of the secret history of the nineteenth century, Baron Stockmar. This Coburg physician was not only a living dictionary, but, what is more rare, a born diplomat. He was a practitioner of public law rather than of medicine, and, strangely for a German, had specialized in the study of constitutional monarchy according to the English formula. Léopold and his confidant had formed for themselves a complete theory of government, and the Belgian Constitution, which they had examined together in the silence of Marlborough House, seemed to them, despite its faults, a proper framework on which to try out their theory.

The Prince, however, had set forth upon an adventure which was not without risks. Viewed from the outside, the Belgium of 1831 could not fail to excite anxiety. For a year the nation, victorious in the insurrection of September, had been racked with fever. She had fought stubbornly the will of the powers. Her ardent desire to remain free within the frontiers she had traced had brought her into conflict not only with the Northern powers, hostile by principle to any break in the system of 1815, but also with England, which had only reluctantly renounced the Orangist solution. On several occasions the Congress had defied the Conference of London with an audacity

severely judged in high places. The country had had for a long time the reputation of being almost ungovernable.

"I pity him," cried Emperor Francis II, the last Belgian sovereign under the old régime, on hearing of Léopold's election, "for I know that people; no one could act in a manner to satisfy it." [3]

There was fear, naturally, of the spread of French ideas in Belgium, and an utter failure to realize the profoundly national character of the movement of 1830. It was suspected that the radical parties in Paris had ramifications in Belgium. It was known that Orangist intrigues went on in the dark. The Government of the Regent was without prestige.

The Belgian cause had not been incarnated in a man. Lebeau, whose sagacious efforts had finally brought to triumph the national policy which England supported without enthusiasm, had not had the opportunity to make personal contacts with those influential in the European concert of powers. The other envoys of Revolutionary Belgium who presented themselves at London had appeared, as Talleyrand disdainfully expressed it, "very new in affairs." Holland was hostile; Prussia and Austria were hardly benevolent. In England some people questioned the sincerity of France. To those who did not know the fundamental qualities of the Belgian people, its moderation and sagacity, the liberal Constitution voted by the Congress appeared to be a challenge to good sense.

The Prince, in spite of all, was optimistic. In the royal family of England he had been nicknamed *Marquis peu à peu* and *Monsieur tout doucement,* so expert was he

[3] Despatch of Count Appony, Nov. 22, 1849. Published by A. De Ridder, in "L'Eventail," May, 1925.

in getting around difficulties and gaining his ends without fuss. The terrible Belgians, with their blouses, their tricolor cockades, their love of liberty, their slightly infantile boasting, did not frighten him. He had conceived an entire program which would give them a Royalty at the same time sympathetic and beneficent. But he realized that, to succeed, he had first to win the heart of the nation.

His candidacy for the throne had aroused no sentimental enthusiasm like that a few months before for the Duke of Nemours, son of the victor of July, and the Duke of Leuchtenberg, heir to the imperial glory. Charles Rogier had very well expressed the sentiments of the majority when he said to the Congress:

"I do not at all base my argument on the personal qualities of the Prince. For my part, I do not feel myself greatly attracted by his personality. You know on which side my choice falls, and for whom are my affections, and it is not without sharp regret that, forced by circumstances, I renounce them. But friends in whom I have confidence describe him to me as a man of sense, good manners, and good habits, loving the arts and understanding the situation of the country. That is enough for a constitutional king with republican institutions."

On Sunday, July 17, at six o'clock on a beautiful morning, Léopold I left Calais. "I made the entire journey from Calais to Dunkirk alone with the King in his coach," wrote General Belliard. "I was very much pleased; I believe he felt the same with regard to me. I gave his Majesty some valuable advice for his future conduct." [4]

[4] "Mémoires du général Belliard," Vol. II, p. 198.

From Dunkirk the procession followed the coast toward Belgium. On the beach of La Panne, at the frontier itself, were grouped the authorities charged with greeting the new sovereign in the name of the nation: M. de Sauvage, Minister of the Interior, the generals Marquis de Chasteleer, Count d'Hane, Baron d'Hoogvorst, van Coeckelberg, Duvivier, de Wauthier. The lithographs of the time have left us a picture of this meeting, full of local color. The post-chaise has stopped by the boundary post, in a landscape in which one recognizes the wooded dunes that constitute the charm of this out-of-the-way corner of the coast. A platoon of civic guards is presenting arms, while the Prince hastens forward with extended hand toward a group of decorated personages who bow with eager cordiality.

This is the frontispiece of the history of the dynasty. To-day another picture upon the background of the same sandy beach rises before our eyes. It is that of the grandson of Léopold I, pacing the shore at the hour when the Great War had left in his kingdom only the forty villages crouching behind the Yser. The vows exchanged on July 17, 1831, on the soil which was to remain inviolate, were not in vain! . . .

The French escort then took leave of the new King of the Belgians and the procession, augmented by the national authorities, started for Furnes. That picturesque little city, typically Flemish, was in an uproar. The chorus of Sainte-Cécile sang lustily the "Brabançonne." Triumphal arches spanned the streets and all the houses were decorated with flags. The King and his suite dined at the home of M. Ollevier, colonel of the civic guard, with the members of the city council, the judges,

the officers of the civic guard, and the curates of the two parishes. The city, proud of the honor that had fallen to it, had spent five hundred francs in order to do things grandly.[5] Lebeau recounts in his "Souvenirs":

> Never has a more touching sight met my eyes than the expression of joy and happiness on every face. There was nothing formal or artificial in this reception; everything was genuine and spontaneous. No instructions had been given by the Government. The people had been left to themselves, and they had done a thousand times better than any official program. It was clear that at the sight of Léopold I hope and a sense of security succeeded profound discouragement. We heard it shouted in the crowd: "He is ours. It is not the foreigners who impose him on us, and it is not a foreigner who will rule."[6]

Beyond Furnes, across the Veurne-Ambacht furrowed with ditches, the procession bent its way toward Ostend, through the scattered villages of the country which borders the pale line of the dunes. The new King had taken his place in a carriage drawn by six horses. Toward six o'clock he arrived at the gate of the city, where the burgomaster, M. Lanzgweert, and the local authorities were awaiting him. In offering him the keys of the city, in conformity with the traditional ceremony of the country, the first magistrate of Ostend made an address that showed the reactions of which Belgian opinion was capable:

"These same keys," said M. Lanzgweert, "were offered to Emperor Joseph II, whose memory the people of Ostend still bless. That Prince caused our city to flourish, by making it a free port. . . . Like him, your

[5] Proceedings of the Conseil de Régence of Furnes, July 16, 1831.
[6] Fréson, "Souvenirs personnels de Joseph Lebeau," pp. 148 *et seq.*

Majesty will know how to protect our commerce and our navigation."

Next the Prince proceeded to the Grande Place, escorted by detachments of the civic guard and the army, and numerous local societies. In the streets decorated with banners and triumphal arches swarmed an enthusiastic crowd. The horses of the royal carriage were unhitched and, drawn by the inhabitants, Léopold made his joyous entry into the seaside city. He was moved and delighted by such a reception. He alighted before the Church of Saint-Pierre and received the homage of the clergy.

"Monsieur le Curé," said he to the dean, "you can rest assured that you will find in me a firm, faithful, and sincere supporter of your religion."

He then made a tour of the port, where every building was gaily decorated with flags, and was present at the launching of a vessel christened with his name. Lodged with the burgomaster, whose house, under the Empire, had given hospitality to Napoleon and Marie-Louise, the Prince received in audience the notables and had a talk with Mgr. Van de Velde, Bishop of Ghent. That evening he presided over a dinner of forty covers. In illuminated Ostend the celebration was prolonged far into the night.

On July 18 he departed for Bruges. The itinerary had been carefully arranged and sixty post-horses waited at each relay station. Everywhere along the route the villages were decorated. The poorest houses were adorned with flowers and flags. The priests stood before their churches and parents lifted their children in their arms to show them this cavalcade which carried good fortune to the country. Says Lebeau:

I recognized in this Flemish population that ancient worship of sovereign power which they have always been able to reconcile with their sometimes turbulent love of liberty. I saw how much violence would have been done to the customs and traditions of the country if, in place of a prince who recalled to them their Counts of Flanders and their Dukes of Brabant, they had been given a president who could have spoken neither to their memories nor to their imaginations, and whom no one could have understood.

At ten o'clock the Prince entered Bruges amid acclamations and attended a breakfast at the city hall. He next presented himself at the Church of Notre-Dame, where he was addressed by the Abbé de Foere, a member of the Congress. A Protestant himself, Léopold was particularly careful to show immediately, as he had the previous evening, his respect for the religion of the country.

"Monseigneur the Bishop," he said, "made known to me, at Ostend, his desire to see erected here a bishopric and a seminary. Although that does not in any way depend upon me, I desire greatly to be able to coöperate. My relations with the Holy See have always been friendly, and I believe that my good offices in this matter may be of some weight."

The Prince then visited the Hospital of Saint-Jean and at three o'clock he left for Eecloo and Ghent, where he was to spend the night in the palace of the provincial government, with Baron de Lamberts.[7]

The visit to the capital of Flanders was an experiment that Léopold had deliberately decided upon. Ghent was the only city, except Liége and Antwerp, where the Orangists had remained really influential. The Revolu-

[7] Cf. "Journal des Flandres," *passim.*

tion had, in fact, directly injured the great industries by cutting off the magnificent outlet which the commercial prosperity of the Kingdom of the Netherlands had procured for them. At Ghent, particularly, the linen industry, prosperous up to the preceding year, was badly depressed and poverty threatened the working classes, whose lot the introduction of machinery had made singularly precarious and wretched.

In Ghent the ruling class was so hostile to the Government at Brussels that the regular city authorities had had to be replaced by a special commission. In the course of the year many Orangist plots had been brewed there. Ghent was a blot in the midst of Flanders, where the depth of Catholic feeling had given intensity to the revolutionary spirit. Even after the election of the King and the acceptance of the XVIII Articles, unwholesome agitation had persisted. On July 12 cotton-weavers in the pay of the Orangists had carried through the streets an effigy dressed in the English style and seated on a donkey, with cries of "Down with Saxe-Coburg!" and riots had followed this insulting demonstration.

The royal party arrived toward half-past seven at the Bruges Gate, where were grouped the authorities of the city. The streets had been planted with evergreens and spaced off with triumphal arches. In response to the homage presented by the chief of the local administration, the Prince made a very appropriate little speech.

"I have seen with sorrow," said he, "the state of suffering of the city of Ghent during the Revolution. You all know I am not the cause of it; I have not come among you to leave your wounds bleeding, but to heal them. I have followed with attention all the phases of the Revo-

lution. I know your needs and I will apply myself especially to the reopening of the sources of prosperity of this industrious city."

He then took his place in a calash with six horses, put at his disposal by the burgomaster, and, escorted by detachments of cavalry and the societies of the city, proceeded to the Government Palace. He pleased the crowd as he had just pleased the notables. If there were along the line some houses whose windows were closed, the streets were full of people and the enthusiasm mounted more and more. The number of patriots concealed the absence of members of the opposition. The Prince stopped at the Church of Saint-Nicolas, and again had some happy words for the clergy. The next day he visited Saint-Bavon, the university, and a few factories. He made a gift of ten thousand florins to the poor.

At the great slaughter-house he was addressed by a representative of that ancient corporation.

"This tree which our patriotic hands have planted," comically cried the worthy spokesman of the butchers, referring to the tree of liberty, "will put out roots and branches under your protecting hand, and the citizen's cap which it wears may be worthily adorned henceforth with the ornaments of a crown honored by your Majesty's virtues. Long live Léopold the First! Long live the King!" If Metternich had heard this discourse, he could well have foreseen from the audacious metaphors the progress of conservative ideas in Belgium!

On the afternoon of the nineteenth the Prince resumed his journey by way of Alost.

"I arrive among you," said he to a group of burgo-

masters of the region, "with the firm intention of strengthening your institutions, of maintaining your liberties and making them respected, and of defending your independence. The touching reception I have received since I first stepped on Belgian soil has proved to me that in accepting the crown I have complied with a national desire."

The presence of the King united the patriots divided during the last few months. Lebeau writes in his account of this journey:

> Happiness was in every soul; the members of the Congress who had been passionate enemies could not meet in the path of the royal party without shaking hands and embracing, forgetting past quarrels in rallying to him whom the masses as well as the politicians proclaimed the consolidator of independence.

Night had fallen. The Prince had taken into his carriage Lehon, the Belgian envoy at Paris. From Assche on the highway was filled with a crowd of horsemen and carriages come out from Brussels to meet the royal party, thus again delayed. It was not until half-past ten in the evening, by the light of torches, that the Prince finally arrived at the palace of Laeken, the residence of the last Archdukes, which was to be his home and where thirty-four years later he was to die.

A large audience grouped itself to receive him—the Regent, the ministers, the high functionaries, the officials and members of the Congress, several of whom had voted against his election. The Regent, old Baron Surlet de Chokier, picturesque in his long curls, greeted the new chief of state. The Regent had done nothing to aid Lebeau—on the contrary. A few months earlier he had

disclosed his personal sentiments to the secretary of the French Legation:

"If Saxe-Coburg is necessary to settle the affairs of Belgium, I consent, but my heart repulses him. . . . Coburg here means the English." [8] Nevertheless this simple and benevolent magistrate performed with good grace the preliminary formalities of his own abdication.

There had been formed at Laeken a provisional court. The palace servants who had remained at Brussels during the Revolution had been reëngaged. Léopold had sent his horses and carriages from England. He was able to keep house at once.

July 20 passed in preparation for the great celebration on the morrow. The new King received the political leaders. In particular he again saw Joseph Lebeau, who played from the wings a rôle of the first importance, and submitted to him the manuscripts of the speech he planned to deliver in taking possession of the throne. The Deputy from Huy made corrections only in form. The two men had an equal comprehension of the necessities of the moment and had confidence in each other.

The triumphal day of the inauguration of Léopold I left a profound impression upon all those who were present. Léopold on horseback and in the uniform of a Belgian general, escorted by a brilliant procession, entered Brussels, where for the first time the revolutionary Government took on the color of royal pomp. The civic guard, the army, those wounded in the September fighting, accompanied the King-elect across the city. On a litter trimmed with laurels citizens carried a mutilated hero of the barricades.

[8] "Mémoires du général Belliard," Vol. II, p. 253.

At the Laeken Gate Léopold was received by the burgomaster, who presented to him the keys of the city. The magistrate who rendered the new sovereign this ancient mark of respect was a Jacobin who had participated in the French conquest of Belgium. Now, reformed and honored, he spoke the language of wisdom and loyalty.

"Elected by the nation, magnanimous Prince," said he, "come, take possession of the throne to which you are called by the unanimous voice of a free people. You will maintain, sire, our charter and our immunities. We will defend your throne and preserve intact your royal prerogatives. . . ."

In the midst of an enormous crowd delirious with joy Léopold made his way slowly to the Place Royale, which he did not reach until quarter-past one. There in the open air, under the portico of the Church of Saint-Jacques-sur-Coudenberg, in the presence of the Congress and all the official bodies of the State, the solemn oath was to be administered.[9]

The managers of the ceremony had sought to invest it with much display. Booths decorated with trophies, flags, and flowers surrounded the square. In front of the church, at the center of a long platform, rose the throne, surmounted by a white-and-gold canopy. The Grande Harmonie orchestra, grouped about the liberty tree planted in the middle of the square, played patriotic airs. The Place Royale had already been the scene of two similar ceremonies. It was there that the last sovereign of the old régime, the Emperor Francis, had sworn allegiance to the Constitution of the provinces. It was there

[9] Cf. Huyttens de Terbeco, "Discussions du Congrès National," Vol. III, pp. 613 *et seq.*

also that the King of the Netherlands had sworn to respect the fundamental law.

The procedure adopted by the Congress was obviously based on the old traditions of Belgian law which established a true contract between the sovereign and his subjects. The new King, received by the Regent and the ministers, in the midst of the Congress, was first conducted to a simple arm-chair placed in the center, and as a spectator watched M. Surlet de Chokier surrender his powers. When the articles of the Constitution had been read and Léopold had solemnly taken the oath administered by M. Nothomb, the President of the Congress cried, "Sire, ascend the throne!" Léopold then mounted the steps of the platform. The chairs were rapidly removed. The ministers, the generals, and the officials of the Congress grouped themselves to the right and left of the King, while cannon thundered and people cheered.

The sober and well-considered speech of the King, delivered with contagious warmth, produced a most fortunate impression.

"The promptitude with which I have come to Belgian soil," said he, "must have convinced you that, true to my word, I waited only to see you yourselves remove the obstacles that opposed my advent to the throne. The diverse considerations set forth in the important discussion which brought about this result will be the object of my most lively solicitude. I have received since my entry proofs of a touching good-will. I am moved as well as grateful. The sight of the people ratifying with their acclamations the act of the representatives of the nation has convinced me that I was called by the will of the country, and I realize all the duties that such a reception

imposes. Belgian by your adoption, I shall make it my law always to be Belgian in my policies."

After this profession of faith, so well calculated to satisfy national sentiment, the King paid homage to France, whose rôle he was accused of having minimized in a former address at Marlborough House. Then, with complete comprehension of the needs of the country, he promised to consecrate his efforts to the interests of commerce and industry.

"I wish," said he, "enlightenment on all sorts of subjects, and to encourage all phases of improvement, and it is in connection with these matters that I purpose to assemble, as I have already begun to do, the ideas most suitable for illuminating the course of the Government. Gentlemen, I have accepted the crown which you offered me, only with the purpose of fulfilling a task as noble as it is useful—that of consolidating the institutions of a generous people and of maintaining its independence. My heart knows no other ambition than to see you happy. On so touching and solemn an occasion I must express to you one of my most ardent wishes. The nation has just passed through a violent crisis. May this day efface all hates and stifle all resentments! May one thought—that of a free and sincere union—animate all Belgians."

After some gracious words for the Regent the King ended with a promise to appeal if necessary to the courage of the Belgian people to defend by arms their country and its independence.

The King then walked to the neighboring palace, while members of the Congress returned to their usual meeting-place to hold a last session. A little later he received the deputies, who were presented to him province

by province, and entertained them at a banquet. His reserved courtesy commanded esteem and respect. In the salons furnished as in the time of King William, old M. van Meenen appeared in riding boots; the other deputies with white hats and threadbare coats bore witness to the fact that the new monarchy depended upon the middle classes, now in control. In the evening there were fireworks which, as usually happens, were spoiled by rain.

On July 22 the King attended a *Te Deum* at Sainte-Gudule. He was received by the Bishop of Tournai, the see of Malines having been vacant since the death of the Prince de Méan.

"I am profoundly touched," said the King to the representative of the episcopacy, "with the reception the clergy have given me. I am well aware of the zeal the Belgian people have for their faith, and I shall take care to respect it. Although the Constitution has entirely separated religion and government, the clergy may be assured of my constant good-will. The more religious the Belgian nation is, the easier it will be to govern, and through the fidelity of its ministers it will preserve always the same attachment to its worship, its sovereign, and its laws."

There was a review of the troops. The King went to the Square of the Martyrs and gave thirty thousand florins for those wounded in the Revolution. He visited La Grande Harmonie and the Botanical Gardens, two institutions in which he was interested because of his taste for music and for the natural sciences. On July 23 he gave his first court dinner, of thirty covers. The presence of the Bishop of Tournai and two curates of prominent Brussels parishes established a lasting precedent. Stock-

mar arrived from London and took in hand the organization of the royal household.

The next day General Belliard, who had been to Paris, dined in his turn at the palace, with several officers of the civic guard. Léopold called upon the Regent. A gazette of the time says:

> The King, passing modestly through the groups of people which formed along the way, overcome by his popularity, could see on all sides what love had permeated this good nation which expects nothing from him but happiness and prosperity. Upon his appearance, all bared their heads; all observed that propriety which characterizes the Belgian people.[10]

The inauguration of the King had logically to be followed, in a country so attached to traditions of decentralization, by a visit of the sovereign to the principal cities of the kingdom. But first it was necessary to constitute a Government. Lebeau and Devaux, the most influential members of the ministry which had come into power in March when the Revolution appeared to be on the point of disruption, had withdrawn after the acceptance of the Treaty of the XVIII Articles, to give proof of their disinterestedness.

It was Lebeau, however, who had the largest share in the formation of the first ministry of the King, composed of de Muelenaere, de Sauvage, Coghen, Raikem, and General Baron de Failly. He thought that after the bitter controversies which had racked the Congress, the hour had come to call upon persons of the second rank, less involved than he in the issues that had arrayed many sincere patriots against one another.

[10] "Journal des Flandres."

This calculation, although based on good enough parliamentary tactics, underestimated the enormous difficulties with which the Government was faced. To put the constitutional machinery in motion, to give definite direction to the powers of government, to restore a recognition of authority in the country, was not too great a task for the most level heads, the most decided energies, and the strongest characters. This concession to the animosities that had divided the founders let the government fall at a peculiarly critical moment into weak and inexperienced hands.

Actual danger was near, and no one in Belgium suspected it. The King had left London with the absolute conviction that the decisions of the Conference of London were to receive the definitive approval of the five great powers. It was scarcely believable that the King of Holland would dare to defy the decree of Europe. Nevertheless, General Tieken de Terhove, who commanded near Antwerp, had noticed since July 10 a disturbing activity on the frontier. On July 26, William joined the Dutch army which, considerably reinforced, occupied northern Brabant. By the first of August, concentration was completed.

Holland meanwhile was protesting through diplomatic channels against the treaty, the advantages of which for Belgium had been too clearly demonstrated in the public discussions of the Congress. For several months, moreover, King William had been fomenting an Orangist movement in the interior, and had been encouraged in this, up to the beginning of spring, by the secret intrigues of English diplomacy. The confusion which had preceded the election of Léopold had inclined some persons high

in political and military circles to lend a complacent ear. The event of July 21, which had defeated the prophecies of the pessimists, was still too recent for all the strings of dubious intrigue to have been cut.

If one is to believe a letter from Grégoire addressed to van Doorn on July 18, General Daine must have promised in advance, for a financial consideration, to facilitate the movements of Dutch troops.[11] The army, some of whose superior officers were of doubtful loyalty, was in the most deplorable state of disorganization. Although the Minister of War reported otherwise, the effective troops in the north numbered scarcely twenty-four thousand men. The strategic arrangements were unfortunate, the command lamentably incompetent. The Congress had conceded too much to the anti-militarist spirit of the Belgian people, and the Government of the Regent had given slight attention to the organization of the Belgian forces.

On Thursday, July 28, the King, accompanied by his new military household and the Minister of War, repaired to Antwerp, which General Chassé still threatened with the cannon of the Citadel. He was magnificently received. Passing along the docks of the Scheldt, amid popular applause, he could see from a distance the shakos of the Dutch garrison. The following day he reviewed in the neighborhood the little Army of the Scheldt, commanded by General Tieken de Terhove. On July 30 the King proceeded to Hasselt by way of Malines, Louvain, and Tirlemont. To the clergy of Malines, who received him on the threshold of Saint-Rombaut, he made some

[11] Colenbrandner, "Gedenkstukken der algemeene geschiedenis van Nederland," 10de deel. Grégoire to van Doorn, July 18, 1831.

recommendations indicating a few of the conclusions he had reached since his arrival in Belgium.

"In order to end the state of violence in the country," said he, speaking to the canons of the cathedral, "it will be necessary often to preach docility. I have already learned that the Belgian mind is well disposed and susceptible to the best direction. In your efforts to maintain good order, you will always find me a sincere and devoted supporter. . . ."

On July 31 the King inspected the Army of the Meuse, assembled under General Daine on the heath of Zonhoven. He believed more than ever that there was to be peace, and did not withhold from the troops the usual compliments. Clear-sighted officers had noted suspicious movements in Holland and had pointed out to General de Failly the tone of the Dutch journals. But serenity reigned in high places.

The King left the next day and, passing through Tongres *en fête,* and through villages where the civic guard armed with hunting guns and pikes lined the way, arrived at Liége. As at Ghent, he was careful to express his solicitude for industry, and spoke of the commercial treaties to be made. This was the best way of replying to the Orangists and the French party, who early in July had caused the patriots lively anxiety. To the clergy, led by Mgr. van Bommel, the King was particularly cordial.

"In accepting the crown the Belgian people have offered me," said he, "I have wished more than their happiness. I have sought that of all Europe by sparing it the horrors of a general war, which would have overthrown your institutions and your hopes and ruined all the

peoples. But I am happy to see this act of devotion recompensed at once by the love of my people. . . . I see with genuine pleasure the union of mind and heart between the people and the clergy, and the intimate confidence of the one in the other. I rejoice because I have the conviction that a religious people is more friendly to order, law, and its King than a people which leans toward irreligion. And so, gentlemen, however independent the Church may be of the State by virtue of the Constitution, as there will always be mutual relations between them you may count on finding me constantly your friend." [12]

That evening there were a banquet at the Hôtel de Ville, a concert, and fireworks. On August 2 the King reviewed the civic guard on the Square of Saint-Lambert, but, finding himself fatigued by so many busy days, he decided to postpone a visit to the factories of the Liége district. He was planning to pursue his trip through Verviers, Spa, Huy, Namur, Charleroi, Mons, and Tournai, when suddenly, early in the afternoon, a courier who had ridden post-haste from Antwerp brought the news of the Dutch repudiation of the armistice. Independent Belgium, which had welcomed with delight its first days of tranquillity and happiness, was again to be subjected to all the agonies of war.

[12] "Journal de Liége," *passim.*

Chapter III

THE TEN DAYS' WAR

The army of the Netherlands had been well-nigh dissolved in September and October, 1830. The sympathy of the soldiers of Belgian origin for the insurgents, and the desertion or resignation of most of the officers who were natives of the Belgian provinces, had produced such confusion that the troops had nowhere been able to stand against the bands of patriots. But, separation once accomplished, King William hastened to reconstitute the military force he needed to free himself from the tutelage of the Conference of London. At the end of July, 1831, he had under arms more than eighty thousand men. A force of fifty thousand, perfectly equipped, provided with a general staff and all necessary services and reinforced by Swiss and German mercenaries, was concentrated on the northern frontier of Belgium, under the command of the Prince of Orange. Nothing had been left to chance. A plan of campaign had been minutely worked out.

The disorder that had reigned in Belgium throughout the year had made it easy for Dutch spies to report on the country's feeble measures of defense. The Orangists, too, had ingeniously sowed distrust and made sure of more or less avowed accomplices in the army and the administration of the new State. The Dutch Government

had assured the officers of their militia who hesitated to undertake an offensive campaign in Belgium, that the war would be nothing but a military promenade, arranged with influential friends.[1]

The Belgians had not been so far-sighted. The Provisional Government had tried to build a national army out of the remnants of the one the Revolution had defeated. Everything was lacking—officers, men, and equipment. The very spirit which made the insurrection possible, made the task of organizing a strictly disciplined force difficult.

In September the revolutionists had forced the gates of the barracks, invested the fortresses, fought on the barricades; the enemy had fled before citizens armed with shot-guns and pikes. What was the use, they argued, of trained soldiers, what was the use of all that military discipline so contrary to the masses' conception of liberty? The ministry of the Regent had but feebly combated this easily explicable attitude. The Congress was interested only in the civic guard—and it had done but little to prepare this militia for the very limited rôle it could play in time of war. The Government boasted of having an army of 60,000 men at its disposal, but was forced to admit that the number of effective soldiers was only 40,000. Actually, the situation was much worse. Belgium could scarcely put into the field more than two divisions, plus a few scattered units and nineteen squadrons of cavalry.

There was an Army of Flanders; but it comprised only 3,700 men posted at intervals from the sea to the Scheldt.

[1] Cf. comte A. du Chastel: "1830 les Hollandais avant, pendant et après la Révolution, d'après les souvenirs du comte F. du Chastel," pp. 120, 121.

There was an Army of Luxemburg of 4,000 men, scarcely organized, poorly equipped, cantoned far from the probable field of operations. The greater part of the national forces consisted of the armies of the Scheldt and the Meuse.

The Army of the Scheldt, commanded by General Tieken de Terhove, guarded Antwerp and blockaded the Citadel, which was still occupied by Dutch troops. It numbered 16,000 men, of whom hardly 8,000 were available for operations in the open field. Made up of three brigades plus a brigade of cavalry, it was spread out from Donck to Gheel, with its headquarters at Schilde. General Daine's Army of the Meuse was nominally made up of 14,000 men, but if one subtracts the garrisons of Venloo and Tongres, there were only 9,000, divided between Venloo, Ruremonde, Brée, and Hasselt.

Thus, against the 50,000 Dutch under the Prince of Orange, Belgium had but a few more than 20,000 men divided into two corps, eighty or a hundred kilometers apart. The road to Brussels was wide open. The Belgians had failed to construct on the Demer and the Nethe field-works to retard the eventual march of the enemy. What was the use, since there was no longer any thought of war? Since the partizans of a peaceful solution had won at Brussels, Belgians thought that Dutch recourse to violence had passed quite beyond the realm of possibility.

The disposition of troops made by the Government of the Regent was so maladroit that it is believed by some to have constituted a preconceived plan of treason. At the very end of March, General Daine despatched his aide-de-camp to Brussels for the sole purpose of delivering to

Regent Surlet de Chokier a letter in which he stressed the weakness caused by this dispersion of the Belgian forces:

> If the enemy should boldly interpose themselves between the army in the province of Antwerp and my own, they could revictual Maestricht and beat us separately before we could join forces, for they would be everywhere superior to us in numbers, both because we are scattered, spread out on a too extended line of defense, and because there is no unity in our operations.

On June 29, General Goethals, who was kept out of the way, in a small command, wrote to the Minister of War. To free himself from responsibility for what he called *un défaut capital* in the disposition of the troops, he called attention to "the too great separation which exists between the Army of the Scheldt and that of the Meuse, a separation which will prevent mutual assistance, and in consequence exposes them to being crushed one after the other."

He suggested placing the army of General Daine near Gheel, behind the little Nethe, and, above all, bringing about unity of command.

Unfortunately, the Minister of War, General de Failly, had not taken these warnings to heart. It was not until July 20 that the establishment of a camp at Zonhoven was decided upon. Nothing had been done in the meantime to facilitate the junction of the two divisions so pompously called armies. They continued to lack the men, officers, and equipment demanded by the generals. Indeed, the class of 1826 was discharged from the army; 9,000 trained soldiers were replaced by recruits who had not so much as pulled a trigger. The serious gaps in the organization of the several units and services

and the lack of discipline and of confidence in every rank were the more woeful because the Government had neglected to appoint a general staff capable of working out and putting into effect a plan of operations.

Following the announcement of the breaking off of the armistice, General de Failly left Liége for Brussels, having first instructed General Daine to hold himself strictly on the defensive.[2] As the hours went by, nothing was done toward concentrating the feeble forces. The King, being without a minister to help him, called upon Joseph Lebeau, who had resumed the modest duties of *avocat-général* of the Court of Appeal. The sovereign felt that the man who had so generously effaced himself at the time of his accession would be, in these critical circumstances, a better adviser than the inexperienced ministers at Brussels.

"If I had been able to devote several months to the organization of the army, I should not fear the struggle," he said to M. Lebeau. "I might almost welcome it. A victory would arouse the affection of the army and the country for their new-born nation and for the chief who had fought at its head. But to be taken unaware, that is unfortunate!" And going straight to the point, the King asked:

"What do you think of the state of the army? Do you think it capable of resisting an attack, of fighting in the field?"

M. Lebeau, who had led the Revolution to success with clear-sightedness and courage, had been able to keep his mind free from self-deception. He did not at all un-

[2] Order of Aug. 2, received at 2 A.M., Aug. 3.

derestimate the strength of the enemy; he did not believe that enthusiasm could, in war, take the place of science, organization, and discipline. Estimating accurately the really tragic situation of the young, scarcely established State, still weakened by the uncertainty which long had cast a shadow on its future, he declared that it was not possible to count on a victorious resistance in the field.

"Your conclusion," demanded the King.

"My conclusion, sire, is that it is necessary this very instant to send couriers to Paris and London, to demand the execution of the engagements entered into by these two powers—the guaranty of our neutrality stipulated in the Eighteen Articles." [3]

The advice was bold, because the country had lived for a year in a sense of false security. The victories of September had convinced Belgium that its citizenry was invincible, and it could not appreciate the difference between the combats of the preceding year and those that now threatened. To appeal for outside help was to wound the immeasurably enlarged national pride. It was also to ignore the Constitution, which required the approval of the Chambers for the admission of an alien army to the country. But these objections were no obstacle to Lebeau, who saw that the very existence of Belgium was at stake. If the Prince of Orange reached Brussels, there was danger that all the work of the Conference of London would amount to nothing. In the face of the accomplished fact, who would remember the promises of the protocols? A reconquered Belgium would be declared

[3] Cf. Fréson, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

too frail to live; and then undoubtedly would follow partition and the final ruin of all its hopes.

Lebeau was so convinced of the necessity of acting without the loss of an hour that he offered to reënter the cabinet, assuming responsibility for the policy he advocated. Léopold acquiesced. Without waiting for a regular investiture, Lebeau wrote at once to Lehon in Paris and Van de Weyer in London, to enjoin these ministers to request the immediate intervention of the powers.

The King, on his part, wrote personally to Louis-Philippe and to the King of England. He also addressed letters to Lord Grey and to his friend Lord Durham, and charged Sir Henry Seton, who had remained temporarily in his suite, to carry them with all haste to London. Thus, in the festive atmosphere which still pervaded Liége, he took a step decisive of the future of his reign. At nine in the evening he left by carriage with Lebeau, and at four in the morning reached the capital. It was a bold move. It might have cost him his crown and his life.

During the third day of August the ministry was reformed. Charles de Brouckere, a man of energy and ability, was called to the Interior in place of de Sauvage. Lebeau became minister without portfolio, Baron de Failly, who was becoming daily more unpopular, yielded the portfolio of War to General d'Hane. The Council of Ministers ratified the appeal to the powers, made at Liége, but modified the character of it altogether by prescribing that the French army whose aid was sought should remain at the frontier "ready to enter Belgium when requested by the Government to do so." There is clearly observable in this wording the consequences of

conflicts inevitable when in the hour of peril the direction of affairs is not concentrated in the hands of a single vigorous person. The ministers did not share the pessimism of Lebeau, and in their eyes the absence of Parliamentary approval still constituted an insurmountable obstacle to the immediate summoning of the help demanded by the King. It is not surprising that they had little to say afterward about these hesitations to which the minutes of the Council and the account of M. Thonissen bear witness.

Events moved swiftly. The army of the Prince of Orange had already entered the Campine; an attack was made in Zeeland Flanders. On the night of the third, the King wrote with his own hand a letter to General de Failly, who had just been appointed major-general, tracing the main lines of the only logical plan of action. He ordered the general to go at once to Antwerp and said:

"Command General Daine to move his troops to the left, to protect the line of the Nethe, leaving a garrison at Hasselt. It is urgent to protect this important line. He will have to execute a maneuver on the left of the enemy." [4]

A few hours later the King himself left for Malines and Antwerp, accompanied by Lebeau. He wished by taking command of the army in person to reassure the people, whom the prospect of a new bombardment had terrified. Thanks to the intervention of General Belliard, who exerted himself vigorously in behalf of the Belgians, the Citadel, which General Chassé continued to hold, was neutralized by agreement.

[4] Baron de Failly, "Réponse au général Eenens," p. 52.

But in these goings and comings precious time had been lost. The enemy continued to advance. On August 2 the Prince of Orange had bowled over the Niellon Brigade at the frontier. On the third he was at Turnhout and his left was marching on Hasselt. On the fourth he occupied Gheel and Moll. The Army of the Meuse, on the other hand, had not budged. The Army of the Scheldt was in retreat. In Zeeland Flanders the enemy had taken possession of important dams and submerged ten thousand acres of good land.

Léopold found himself in a terrible position. Only twelve days in the country, he as yet knew neither men nor conditions. He had not been able to recruit his own helpers. The military household which had been constituted for him was identical with that of the Regent. In the army no general had the prestige and authority necessary to impose his will on the rest. The King had to assume the post of commander-in-chief without a trained general staff at his disposal. General de Failly, invested with the duties of major-general, had hardly assumed command before he was discredited so seriously that the King did not dare continue him in that post of confidence. D'Hane, a subaltern under the Empire, had passed in fourteen months, thanks to the Revolution, from the rank of major to that of general. He was at the same time Minister of War and chief of the King's general staff, although he had given no previous evidence of his administrative capacity or his grasp of military tactics. The corps commanders were not of a caliber to supply what was lacking at the top. Daine was a soldier of fortune, of no great education, who had given proofs of bravery, but who had never held a high command. General de Tieken

de Terhove had a brilliant record of service in the cavalry, but he lacked broad intelligence. He was, moreover, a neurotic, actually subject to hallucinations. "He is a man half crazy and entirely incapable," wrote the King to his brother-in-law on September 3, "a fine old colonel of cavalry who in normal times would command but a regiment." [5]

Léopold, for his part, had not had time to study the defense of his kingdom. It was simply as the commander of a brigade that in France he had given proof of his valor. Since then he had not seen active service. He lacked the inflexible firmness of a great military leader. Poorly supported, powerless to command, drawn in different directions by officers whose incapacity he at once discovered, the King unfortunately let himself be diverted from the wise plan of campaign he had formed on the night of August 3.

On August 4, de Failly, in a poorly worded order, had enjoined Daine to close up with de Tieken, just as Léopold had indicated. But a few hours later, impressed by the threat against Antwerp and Venloo at the same time, he modified these first instructions. "New information on the movements of the enemy has decided his Majesty," he wrote, "to change the orders he charged me to communicate to you." Daine was directed to concentrate his forces in the environs of Hechtel, and in case of hostile demonstrations against Venloo to attack the enemy without "disturbing himself about the other divisions which are facing the Army of the Scheldt." De Tieken was kept in the neighborhood of Antwerp. Thus they plunged

[5] Buffin et Corti, "Léopold I^er," p. 76.

directly into the trap set by the Prince of Orange and, instead of uniting all their forces, again lost precious time. This was the capital mistake of the campaign.

On August 5, General d'Hane, with a more accurate comprehension of the situation, ordered the Army of the Meuse to move on Diest. The following day he instructed de Tieken to leave with two brigades to join Daine there. The King's headquarters, however, were in ignorance of the real direction of the advance of the enemy, who that day had taken possession of Diest, the precise point at which the Belgians wished to effect the junction of their forces. The entire maneuver was based on an error. It was toward Louvain and Tirlemont that they should have marched.

The King meanwhile had gone from his headquarters at Malines to Lierre, to confer in person with the commander of the Scheldt army, whose march he considered too slow. He arranged a meeting with him for the next day at Aerschot, where he intended personally to take over the direction of the decisive operations which he planned in the environs of Diest. But on August 7 de Tieken had not yet arrived. Léopold, with boundless energy, sped to Louvain, where the Government was assembling troops of the civic guard which it proposed to push forward to attack the enemy upon three sides and effect the liaison of the two armies, supposedly marching to meet each other.

On August 8, being still without news of de Tieken, who had lingered on the Nethe regardless of the plan of concerted action decided upon by the commander-in-chief, the King left at four in the morning for Aerschot. The Army of the Scheldt was not there, and the King,

greatly disturbed, went to look for it and finally found it at Westerloo.

Now Léopold was satisfied. The day before, they had heard Daine's cannon in the east; the Belgians with a concerted rush were going to take Diest and hold the Demer. In the evening General d'Hane summoned the heads of the army to headquarters at Aerschot and gave them their orders for the morrow. The King, prostrated with fatigue, was unable to preside at this council of war.

But alas! Daine, delayed at first by unfortunate vacillations, held up by fighting to the north of Hasselt on the sixth, and unable to start for Diest until the seventh, was not at all equal to what was now expected of him. On the seventh he won a small victory at Kermpt in which he took four cannon, but he learned at the same time that Saint-Trond had been captured and that Diest was in the hands of the Prince of Orange. In danger of being surrounded by four divisions, early the next morning instead of advancing he beat a retreat, intending to take next the road to Hasselt. He had acted slowly and showed little initiative. His army, moreover, suffered more and more from hunger, and most of its corps commanders were unequal to their tasks.

Marching in column down the road from Tongres to Hasselt, the army was thrown into a panic at Cortessem and streamed back in disorder upon Tongres. To make matters worse, that town had been deserted by the greater part of the garrison. The situation was such that Daine, demoralized and accused of treason, put his troops on the march in the falling dusk and reached Liége, where he hoped to rally his units and meet the

reënforcements expected from Luxemburg. The Belgian forces were thus completely divided at the very time the King believed them united under his hand.

At the royal headquarters nothing was known of what had happened to the Army of the Meuse, and so, early on the ninth, Léopold led the Army of the Scheldt from Aerschot to Montaigu, there to overthrow the enemy and join Daine, who was thought to be near Diest. Suddenly news arrived of the disaster, greatly exaggerated by witnesses who had seen the exhausted troops arrive at Liége. It was the breakdown of the entire combination. Hoping to protect the road to Brussels, now wide open to the Prince of Orange, Léopold fell back upon Louvain. There, on August 11 and 12, his little army, fatigued by hard days of marching in the heat of the sun, discouraged by successive retreats, weakened by the lack of discipline in the civic guard, was beaten and partly surrounded. The division of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar took possession of the Montagne de Fer, cut off communication with the capital, and hurled his cavalry as far as Tervueren, three leagues from Brussels.

We have seen that on August 3 the Council of Ministers had interpreted as simply conditional the appeal made by the King for the armed intervention of France. De Muelenaere, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was hypnotized by legal scruples based on Article 121 of the Constitution. Notwithstanding the swift advance of the invaders, he had maintained his point of view, not hesitating, as White tells us, to say to the King at general headquarters at Malines that he begged him "on bended knee" to give it consideration. The King, new as he was to the country, had to guard against offending the vanity

of his subjects and against appearing insensible to their peculiar conception of honor. He allowed himself, therefore, to be persuaded. On August 6, the Government informed Marshal Gérard, whose army was prepared to enter Belgium, that he must not cross the frontier. The King, meanwhile, had asked the French, in place of reinforcements, for arms, officers, and an experienced general. But he let himself be influenced by the illusions of those about him. On the morning of the ninth he wrote from Aerschot to General Belliard: "Conditions are so favorable that I believe it urgent to stop the movement of Marshal Gérard. The feeling is extremely strong in the army, and I find it will be better to fight without foreign aid." A few hours later Léopold realized his mistake and called for help.

In Brussels, where the news of Daine's rout had already arrived, there was panic. On August 8 the ministry was forced to give the order to open the frontier to the French, who, fortunately, marched the following day. The archives of the Government and the funds of the bank were hurriedly removed. The only possible salvation was in the swift arrival of the allies. To calm the populace, the Grand Marshal of the Court caused to be ostentatiously prepared, at the Hôtel d'Arenberg, a dinner for the Princes of Orléans.

The King, however, did not yet despair. He had sent de Brouckere, Minister of the Interior, to Liége with full power to reorganize the Army of the Meuse and drive it suddenly into the flank of the enemy near Tirlemont. He, himself, strove to stop the invaders before Louvain, with a frontal attack. Wasted effort! Léopold was beaten and would have been taken prisoner had not

the swift march of Marshal Gérard, with whom the Prince of Orange was forbidden to fight, and the intervention of the English minister, brought about the signing of a truce on August 12. The Dutch, victorious, entered Louvain, then slowly retreated. On the twentieth they crossed the frontier, followed at a short distance by the French army, whose mere appearance had been sufficient to destroy all hope of an Orangist restoration.

The timely intervention of France had saved Belgium from the irreparable misfortune which had been imminent. The national army was revealed as incapable of defending the country. Its numerical inferiority, the defects of its organization, and the incompetence of its leaders, had been accentuated by the pitiful condition of the civic guard, which had neither the military training nor the discipline required for effective fighting. "I am proud," one of the King's artillery officers was able to write, "to have, in the presence of their troops, torn the epaulettes from fifty officers of the civic guard and others who ran with their men."[6]

In the regular army, rank, too often awarded by the Provisional Government in accordance with revolutionary passions, was a guaranty neither of competence nor of devotion and loyalty. Although the artillery had given full satisfaction, and the cavalry had in general fought well, many infantry regiments had comported themselves sadly. It was not that the soldiers were bad. They needed to be taken in hand and really commanded. The spirit of equality to which the Revolution had given rise had put constantly on their lips the words *"Je veux"* and *"Je ne*

[6] Du Roy de Blicquy, "Échos de 1830," p. 57. Letter of Lieut. du Roy de Blicquy to his brother Alexis.

veux pas." [7] Moreover, the Prince of Orange, who had conducted his operations with extreme prudence, had undoubtedly been assured of help by some of the corps commanders, which explains the lack of coördination in the movements of the Belgian Army.

After the campaign, there was the usual search for a scapegoat. Generals Daine, de Failly, Goblet, and d'Hane were in turn accused of treason. None of these charges was proved. General Daine, the most compromised because of the rout of the Army of the Meuse, was retired from active service and brought before a committee of investigation. He was accused of wilfully disobeying the King's orders to unite with the army of de Tieken, and of having given evidence of more or less intentional inertia and lack of firmness. He was acquitted and given another command. Forty years later, however, General Eenens, in a series of vigorous pamphlets, bitterly attacked him, including in the arraignment the Minister of War and the Chief of Staff. It is difficult to reach a conclusion in the case of Daine. The inquiry was not carried very far. There were more important things to do in 1831 than to debate an accomplished fact.

General Daine was able to cite in self-defense the frankness of his warnings to the Regent, and M. Thonissen, who in writing his account of the campaign used the oral testimony of the persons in a position to know most about it, definitely concluded that to explain the defeat there was no need of treason. General Capiaumont, an officer of great valor and morally above suspicion, who served on Daine's staff, also exonerated his

[7] Cf. "Mémoire au Roi du général Daine."

chief. But the documents published by the Dutch leave no doubt that they had spies in Belgium. It is disturbing to find that the letters of their agents, dated before August 4, 1831, speak of Daine as a man on whom they could count. In 1833 and in 1839 they assert that they again paid him money. Count Fortuné du Chastel, who used his sources with discretion, asserted that the King of Holland had at the opening of hostilities positive assurance of the coöperation of some of the chiefs of the Belgian Army.[8]

Léopold I always maintained an obstinate silence regarding the suspicious maneuvers which darkened the first days of his reign. He sought consistently, in the words of General Wilmar, "to pass a sponge over the past." [9] He maintained his affectionate confidence in General d'Hane, but, having placed him at the head of his military household, he virtually removed him from high command elsewhere. The other incriminated generals were always received at court. We should still be unaware of his intimate feelings if his daughter, the Princess Charlotte, had not left notes of her "conversations with dear papa," dated September, 1863. We find there this testimony, which indicates without any doubt his real thought. "Have you read," the King said to her, "Colonel Huyberecht's book, 'La campagne de Belgique' [1831]? It is the absolute truth. Part of the army betrayed me, the rest ran away." [10] Now, according to this officer, who is very hard on General Daine, there was treason even at the royal headquarters. "The orders that were trans-

[8] Cf. Colenbrandner, Vol. V. "Les lettres de la période 1831."
[9] Cf. du Chastel, *op. cit.*, p. 195.
[10] Buffin et Corti, "Maximilien et Charlotte," p. 201.

mitted to General Daine," he says, "carried such a stamp of indecision, of ineptitude, of forgetfulness of all principles of war that they would have sufficed to demoralize the most energetic and capable man." [11]

We shall never know more, unless the archives of The Hague give up all their secrets.

The King, who, despite poor health, had spent himself with exemplary energy and courage, alone escaped the vehement criticism which overwhelmed all those responsible for the defeat. He had played his part without *arrière-pensée*. On August 14, General Belliard wrote to the secretary of the French Legation:

> The King of the Belgians has displayed extraordinary coolness and bravery. Often he acted the sub-lieutenant. The other day he was exposed several times to death. He was seen among the skirmishers, giving orders to the columns, placing the artillery, and directing all the movements. Without him, without the care he has taken, the Belgian Army would have been annihilated and the authority of Nassau once more imposed on Belgium.[12]

Thirty years later, evoking the tragic memory of the first days of his reign, for the instruction of his daughter Charlotte, Léopold I said, "There was a bridge near Malines that I could hold only by sitting on it." [13]

The tottering throne to which he had been called, he thus really won. Although defeated, he was received at Brussels, on his return from the army, with increased affection. The public was pleased with him for his devotion and his valor. His calmness at the most critical mo-

[11] Huyberecht, "Histoire politique et militaire de la Belgique en 1831," p. 166.
[12] Belliard, "Mémoires," Vol. II, p. 209.
[13] He refers to the bridge of Campenhout.

ments had impressed every one by revealing a mind clear and master of itself. He refrained from oppressing those deserted by fortune.

"He who has not made mistakes in war," he said to Daine's messenger at Louvain, "has never been to war. The fortune of arms changes daily. In this terrible game both sides lose." [14]

The nation prided itself, in the bitterness of defeat, on having a chief, at least, who was above reproach. In 1869, however, a politician, better known for the vehemence of his sentiments than for the soundness of his judgment, dared to cast suspicion on the conduct of the King during that unfortunate campaign, accusing him of having taken a hand in an English plot to bring the Belgian Army to defeat. The accusation is absurd and does not bear the most summary examination of the facts. It was the King who on August 2 called upon the powers for assistance. We have the texts of the letters that he wrote from Liége, and God knows they are sufficiently urgent! All of his life, everything in his character, gives the lie to the hypothesis of an odious machination which would have been contrary to his most manifest interests.

In truth, the campaign of 1831 was a constant source of regret and humiliation to Léopold. "It is a misfortune which I bewail daily," he wrote on August 30, 1833. He said a little later: "The unfortunate campaign of 1831 makes me suffer frightfully every day, and I would give much to go back to the second of August, eighteen thirty-one. We bear the shame and the suffering of it to-day." [15]

French intervention had saved Belgium from immedi-

[14] "Mémoires du général Capiaumont," p. 757.
[15] Juste, "Léopold I^er^," p. 115.

ate destruction, but the position of the country had undergone a complete change. The task devolving upon the King, which seemed heavy enough the day of his inauguration, had become infinitely more difficult and it was doubtful whether success was still possible.[16]

[16] On the ten days' campaign cf. Thonissen, "La Belgique sous le règne de Léopold Ier," Vol. I, pp. 55 *et seq.;* Huyberecht, "Histoire politique et militaire de Belgique"; Capiaumont, "Mémoires inédits"; Eenens, "Les conspirations militaires de 1831"; de Failly, "Mémoire explicatif du général de Failly et réponse au général Eenens"; Martinet, "Léopold Ier et l'intervention française."

Chapter IV

AFTER THE DEFEAT

BELGIUM had been unable to save herself! Since September, 1830, she had been intoxicated with the proud idea that she owed to no one the independence toward which she had struggled for centuries. Now this powerful reason for life and hope was brutally torn from her. The disillusionment was so painful that the nation almost forgot to rejoice at the rapid evacuation of its territory.

This was effected in the most peaceful fashion. France was not at war with Holland. The withdrawal of the Prince of Orange was executed methodically, according to a plan agreed upon with Marshal Gérard, and everything worked out to perfection. The commander-in-chief of the Dutch Army gave a dinner to the French commander-in-chief at Tirlemont, and from this exchange of courtesies it might be deduced that the King of the Belgians had in the King of the French more a protector than an ally. That was precisely the gravest feature of the situation and the cold reason of Léopold I revealed to him the perils of the impaired position which was now his.

Let us see how things really stood. The Treaty of the XVIII Articles, on the strength of which the King had accepted the throne, was the fruit of an understanding painfully arrived at between France and England, recon-

ciling the results of the Belgian Revolution with the balance established by the treaties of 1815. Now this fundamental understanding, as indispensable to the maintenance of general peace as to the consolidation of the new kingdom, was clearly again in question. England, let us not forget, tardily consented to the destruction of the Kingdom of the Netherlands only on the condition that France, whose warlike power she feared, should be absolutely deprived of any direct or indirect influence over Belgium. And here was the July Monarchy, after many protestations of disinterestedness, quite legitimately in the position of armed tutor of the young State whose neutralized soil she covered with her soldiers. London was all upset over it. England suspected in this unforeseen adventure a carefully worked out plan, a Machiavellian scheme in which honest John Bull had let himself be tricked. Talleyrand wrote to his Government, on August 17:

> The old jealousies are reawakened. There is sensitiveness everywhere, for there is an English emotionalism for two hundred years intimately connected with the question of Holland and the Netherlands, which cannot with impunity be aroused. Lord Grey and the London cabinet are not concealing from themselves, and they do not hide from me, that it is a question not only of their continuance in office but of the preservation of peace.[1]

"France must evacuate Belgium," Palmerston wrote impetuously to his ambassador in Paris on August 13, "or we shall have a general war, and that in a few days." And he said further, "It is a question of peace or war." [2]

[1] Talleyrand, "Mémoires," Vol. IV, p. 271.
[2] Juste, "Notes historiques," pp. 57, 58.

This unreasonable demand took no account of Léopold's tragic position at the moment. The King had received at his Louvain headquarters, on August 11, the English minister newly accredited to his court, and had insisted on the urgent necessity for foreign aid to save him from the enemy who held him by the throat and was prepared to besiege him in the little Brabant city. "The King," reported Sir Robert Adair, "has given me a very discouraging view of the situation. The preceding Government left him almost without an army, and he has just been betrayed by General Daine." [3]

In interviews at Brussels, on August 19, 21, and 22, Léopold had to use all his eloquence and powers of persuasion to make the British diplomat admit that, so destitute was he of all resources after the unfortunate campaign, he could not do without the support of a French corps, were it only a division of infantry and a brigade of cavalry. That was little enough, if one reflects that the Dutch Army remained menacingly at the frontier, and that the city of Antwerp, dominated by the Citadel, was at the mercy of a sudden attack! Between Belgium and Holland there existed no direct juridical relationship, and it was not until August 23 that a protocol of the Conference of London imposed upon the belligerents a suspension of arms, and then for a six weeks' period only. But despite all this, the first of the powers guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium, the one which had most openly patronized the candidacy of the Prince of Saxe-Coburg, now spoke to him only of disarmament!

With regard to France, Belgium's position was very

[3] Colenbrandner, *op cit.* Reports of Sir Robert Adair of Aug. 11, 19, 21, and 22, 1831.

delicate. France had fifty thousand men in Belgium, and before withdrawing them she expressed the desire to settle the fate of the fortresses erected in 1815. She required the demolition of several of those Wellington had set up against her on Belgium's southern frontier. This was a problem which interested all the powers. To yield to France was to loose the storm.

"Negotiation between France and Belgium in the matter of forts," said Sir Robert Adair to de Muelenaere, "is a matter of life and death for the British cabinet; it will not tolerate it."

Meanwhile, Louis-Philippe, who wished to fortify his throne by a diplomatic victory, sent Count de Latour-Maubourg to Brussels, to press the Belgian Government in its last entrenchments. The envoy carried a draft of a treaty and showed it to the English minister, who said: "If you sign, it means a complete rupture with France. For England, it is war." [4]

This dispute between Paris and London, the object of which was of but little interest to Belgium, created a distressing situation. In reality the offensive of the Prince of Orange, although repulsed, had struck a blow at Belgium that threatened to prove mortal. Old intrigues were resumed on all sides as soon as it was seen that the Belgians were not to be feared. If Louis-Philippe in his clear-sighted pacifism remained firmly attached to the moderate policy which excluded any enlargements of French boundaries, the aged Talleyrand was none the less the tempter. On August 11 he opened his heart to Mme. Adélaïde:

"England really should find, in what has just taken

[4] F. de Lannoy, "La Convention des forteresses," in the "Revue générale," 1925.

place in Belgium, reasons to believe that no Belgium is possible, and that it is in a partition that Europe would find the positive guaranty of general peace. But England is far from any such idea. . . ." [5]

The next day the crafty diplomat was bold enough to propose squarely to the Prussian ambassador the carving up of Belgium.[6]

It is easy to understand how Palmerston, apprised of all this, felt his instinctive distrust of the French policy greatly increased. But was that a reason for wishing, as he did, to leave the victims of Dutch aggression without effective protection? The King of the French judged Léopold's position more sanely. "You know this prince," he wrote to Talleyrand. "The friendship that I have for him does not prevent my saying that his character is a sure guaranty that he would not have asked to keep our troops if he had not been convinced that he could not get along without them." [7] An aide-de-camp of the Duke of Orléans was sent to London to bear this message and to explain "the painful, even precarious position of King Léopold, who has neither troops nor administration, so that it would mean annihilation to refuse him the moral and physical support which the presence of our corps of troops alone can assure him after the terrible blow he has just suffered."

The King was aware of the equivocal steps of Talleyrand, and it may be said in passing that he never forgave him. The Order of Léopold was missing, at the end of Talleyrand's career, from his rich collection of *grands*

[5] Talleyrand, "Mémoires," Vol. IV, p. 262.
[6] Juste, "Van de Weyer," p. 173.
[7] Talleyrand, "Mémoires," Vol. IV, p. 278.

cordons. His ulterior motives were the more significant because the attitude of England itself was somewhat enigmatic. From Liége, Léopold had asked the aid of the English fleet; now the latter, concentrated in the Channel, had appeared neither in the Scheldt nor in the Zeeland waters. England had taken no military measure against Holland; she had limited herself to placing an embargo on Dutch vessels. What did she want, exactly? The Treaty of the XVIII Articles seemed abandoned. Distressed by the desolating news that Van de Weyer transmitted to him, the King sent his faithful Stockmar to London for positive information. The latter was able to tell him that if the British statesmen had not actually condemned Belgium, they were now convinced of the powerlessness of the young State and bitterly regretted having weakened Holland for its benefit.[8]

Palmerston, for example, said squarely to Van de Weyer that since the Kingdom of the Netherlands, created in 1815 with a hostile eye on France, was unfortunately shattered, England had now the duty of putting Holland in such a position that she might serve as the second line of defense against the dreaded French. In short, Belgium's best friends had lost confidence in her. Russia, Austria, and Prussia, already so ill-disposed in the month of July, showed themselves openly hostile and refused to receive Belgian envoys at their courts. The game was going against Belgium. So much so that the King carefully suppressed the pessimistic thoughts which obsessed him, and which at times tempted him to abdicate. He was almost alone in recognizing the danger that

[8] Saint-René Taillandier, "Le Roi Léopold et la Reine Victoria," Vol. I, pp. 276 *et seq.*

again threatened the entire work of the Revolution. For several weeks the invisible menace of a diplomatic guillotining existed along with those of a reopening of hostilities and a general conflagration.

The Treaty of the XXIV Articles was born of these woeful circumstances. Imposed by the Conference of London as an irrevocable and sovereign sentence, it constituted an interpretation, unfavorable to Belgium, of the bases of separation of January 1831. The young kingdom lost half of Limburg and half of Luxemburg. It was with great difficulty and at the last minute that the arrondissement of Arlon was saved from dismemberment. Belgium, deprived of the mouth of the Scheldt, removed from the lower Meuse, driven from the Moselle, was stamped with congenital weakness. (Even the Great War itself was not sufficient to return to her the lost possessions.) Her sensibilities were violated, her interests hurt. The powers seemed to wish to deny her a future. And England, who some weeks earlier had appeared to have some hopes for Belgium, now gave her to understand that should she fail to subscribe to all the renunciations required of her, her lot would be left to the decision of arms.

Confronted with the systematic disregard of the promises made at the time of his acceptance of the throne, the King pleaded the cause of Belgium as his own. Misfortune mingled his destiny with that of the country more than years of prosperity could have done. He was quickly convinced that Belgium must yield to force on pain of losing everything. The direction of the negotiations was in his hands. He corresponded personally with Van de Weyer in London and with Lehon in Paris. And Stock-

mar was constantly behind the scenes to keep his master informed and to guide the steps of the official diplomats.

But, remembering the struggles of the Congress, Léopold was, naturally, reluctant to advocate sacrifices which national sentiment had rejected a few months before. When the Government became convinced that the acceptance of the XXIV Articles could no longer be deferred, the King decided, as we shall see later, to submit the treaty to Parliament for ratification. He promised his ministers a dissolution in case Parliament should reject it, and did not hide from them the fact that if the new Chambers still refused to make the sacrifices indispensable to the safety of the country he would renounce the crown sooner than bring a fresh diplomatic disaster upon Belgium.

Meanwhile he was hard at work. An army was needed at once, for the continuance of the armistice was doubtful. The energetic Charles de Brouckere, full of courage and fire, was called to the Ministry of War. By a series of Draconian measures the army was purged of its doubtful elements. The distribution of commissions, made haphazardly at the time of the Revolution, was revised. Moreover, despite England's objections, French officers with the fine traditions of the Empire were placed in command of the general staff and of the large units. The Chambers submissively lent their support to a Government which knew what it wanted. General Evain was installed in the War Department and Desprez assumed the direction of the general staff. French officers distributed throughout the staffs and at other strategic points in the service trained the Belgian Army, as their

successors have since 1918 so brilliantly done for the armies of Poland and Czechoslovakia.

In a few weeks the reorganized army had an effective strength of 66,000 men. But until 1839 the King did not cease for a single day to give constant attention to military affairs. He worked personally with the Chief of Staff destined in case of war to assume the actual direction of operations. He busied himself, regardless of the sensitiveness of the powers, with securing capable foreign officers, especially Poles who had distinguished themselves in the struggle for their independence. Each day the Minister of War submitted to him a brief in which were noted information from the *avant-postes* scattered along the frontier, the ordered movements, the important changes, the disciplinary measures taken in the case of officers. He led inspections and held reviews, anxious to remedy all the defects of the organization as revealed by the ten days' campaign.

The period from August to November, 1831, was a time of intense political and administrative activity. Now that the archives are open, we can appreciate to what extent uncertainty reigned. Belgium was not yet sure of her friends; Russia, Austria, and Prussia were not yet resigned to her continued existence; the Orangists had not yet abandoned hope of upsetting the young monarchy. At the end of October, for example, Orangist agents announced that a revolt had been fomented at Liége. They counted on the garrison of Maestricht and on the support of John Cockerill, who promised funds and the coöperation of his workers.[9] Ghent and Brussels were to

[9] Colenbrandner, *op. cit.* Correspondence of Oct. and Nov. 1831; notably Grégoire to van Doorn, Nov. 7, 1831.

follow suit. The radical parties of Paris dipped into the plots. National feeling, however, carried the day, and all these difficulties were overcome. It was no longer, thank God, the time of the *bon Régent*. Belgium had at last found in monarchy the organ essential to the control of her vital impulses. She felt herself governed. Speaking on October 7 with Sir Robert Adair, who never ceased harassing him with regard to the presence of French officers in the Belgian Army, the King manifested firm confidence. The diplomat wrote in a report:

> His Majesty is perfectly satisfied with the attitude of the public and with the arrangements he has made. . . . The King has lately had the opportunity of learning the opinion of his subjects, for since the beginning of his reign he has studied their character; the upper and middle classes (although divided in some provinces on questions of policy) and a majority of the population are absolutely insensible to the advantages promised by the "propaganda" from Paris, and are clearly hostile to the republican form of government. He is sure of the firm and cordial support of the clergy as such; and its continued influence, from earliest times to the present day, the King attributes to those habits of order and reasoned obedience which, according to him, protect the people from the intrigues of revolutionary committees. That these committees exist here and in other cities of the realm is a fact known to the Government, and it is aware of the necessity of putting them under the surveillance of an effective police; but just now the establishment of any measure of control would be very difficult because of the lack of a trustworthy personnel.[10]

The King's justified optimism with regard to the internal situation gave him the courage to face the constantly recurring difficulties of the diplomatic field, where from day to day he found fresh proof of the powers' lax-

[10] Colenbrandner, *ibid.* Report of Sir Robert Adair, Oct. 7, 1831.

ness in fulfilling their solemn promises. But putting into operation the institutions with which the country had equipped itself, and utilizing them for the best interests of the public, would require a tremendous effort. The Constitution had placed sovereignty in the people and entrusted the supreme power to Parliament. We shall see how the electoral body and the Chambers performed, in these critical times, the rôle assigned them.

Chapter V

THE FIRST ELECTIONS

THE National Congress, its task ended, had decided to efface itself in favor of a parliament elected in accordance with the provisions of the new Constitution. Consequently a royal decree of July 26 had called an election for August 29, to choose the hundred and two deputies and the fifty-one senators.

The electorate was not exactly the same as in 1830. On the one hand, it was enlarged by lowering the tax-paying qualification, which, in the rural districts especially, was close to the twenty-florin minimum provided for by the Constitution; on the other hand, it had been restricted by withdrawing the suffrage from more than seven thousand doctors, priests, officers, functionaries, etc., whom the Provisional Government had given the right to vote because of their occupations. The number of the electors, as a result of this double change, had increased from forty-six thousand to about fifty-five thousand and the influence of the rural regions had been increased at the expense of the cities.

It is indispensable to an understanding of the political situation of the period, to give some attention to the electoral law adopted by the Congress. The authors of the Constitution had wished to confer a share in the political power "on all citizens interested in the well-being

of the nation and capable of helping to make a wise choice." [1] They attempted, besides, to secure a certain equilibrium between city and country by adopting a taxpaying qualification which varied according to localities.

Taxpaying had been chosen as the sole basis of the right to vote. The elector, it was said in the metaphorical style of the time, ought to be rooted in the soil. The fact that he was a taxpayer guaranteed his dependability and evidenced his interest in the good administration of public affairs. This consideration seemed so decisive that the Congress had rejected from the outset all proposals tending to confer any privilege whatever on learning. The taxpaying qualification was not only seen as a conservative barrier; it was defended by the Liberals as a guaranty against the influence of the nobility and the clergy. Polling-places were to be situated only in the principal town of each arrondissement.

"The electors," gravely asserted M. de Theux, "will find there more facilities for enlightening themselves with respect to their choices; there they will be less exposed to local influences."

The place in the public mind which in other circumstances would have been filled by the first political campaign under the new Constitution was in fact occupied by war and invasion. It was only in the last ten days before the election that there was leisure to think of the choice of representatives. The newspapers, full of polemics and recriminations on the sad outcome of the war, gave but tardy attention to the election. Curiously, there were few candidates. The Revolution had destroyed many

[1] See the report made by M. de Theux for the Section Centrale (committee on this subject) Feb. 10, 1831.

reputations, and the debates on the Treaty of the XVIII Articles had stirred up such active animosities that not many honorable citizens were desirous of braving similar storms. The "Courrier des Pays-Bas," on August 31, addressed to them this exhortation which, a hundred years later, brings a smile:

> The greatest reward for his ability and his patriotism to which a citizen can aspire, is to be called by the votes of his fellow-citizens to represent and defend the interests of his country. There is in such a mandate something so noble and so elevated that he who because of a false modesty, a culpable neglect, or a miserable egoism, refuses to respect the wish of his compatriots seems to us no better than a deserter. All true friends of their country have already been scandalized by the numerous declinations and resignations during the session of the Congress. And why? The fear of compromising yourself, an unimportant domestic interest which your absence might harm—are they motives for disdaining the honorable distinction of which you are the object, for abandoning the post the country has confided to you? Let us hope that the Chambers of this year will spare the country this scandal. . . .

Some days later the same paper expressed the hope that numerous members of Congress would be reëlected, so that the country might profit by a dearly acquired experience; but it also asked the support of what would be called to-day *des compétences*.[2] We read in the "Courrier des Pays-Bas" of August 22:

> The Chambers are not only assemblies of lawmakers and economists. The needs of a nation in peace and in war are so many and diverse that we must arrange if possible to have each of these

[2] *Des compétences.* That is, men of special ability in particular lines, such as law, education, finance, etc.—*Translators.*

needs represented. We have seen the frightful results of a lack of specialized abilities, and the lesson has been too terrible for us to forget.

But the parties were not sufficiently organized for these suggestions to be systematically acted upon. Nowhere had the electors formed political groups capable of nominating candidates with any chance of success. Little preparatory work could be done. Nevertheless, it was no longer a matter, as in 1830, of voting the ticket of a sacred union containing the names of the notables of the several factions. The attitude of the country had already changed, and the motives which animated the Catholics on the one hand and the Liberals on the other were more clearly opposed. The position taken in the Congress by certain representatives of advanced liberalism had excited the fears of the Catholic majority. The latter, in fact, very definitely felt that it had not enjoyed, during the regency, all the political influence to which its numbers entitled it, and some imprudent speeches made it fear the possibility of being tricked.

For this reason the bishops were careful to remind the faithful that the use of the vote was a matter of conscience. This episcopal interference, although moderate in substance and form, did not fail to provoke retaliations which mark the beginning of the party struggles of contemporary Belgium. It is difficult, however, to find fault with the bishops, for, faithful to the principles which had dominated the Union of 1829, they demanded nothing but complete liberty within the framework of the Constitution. Canon de Cuvelier, Capitulary Vicar of Namur, explaining to his clergy that the manner in which

the fundamental law would be developed and put in practice depended on the elections, said:

This fact, suitably explained, without detracting from the freedom of the election will cause the electors to feel not only the need of choosing wisely but the account they will have to render to God and to men if, because of indifference, love of ease, or an exaggerated fear of making enemies, they refrain from taking part in the elections and leave to the minority opposed to the real interests of the country the means of dominating and of inflicting their illiberal ideas upon us.

And with a remarkable sense of the needs of his time he went on to say:

While stimulating your zeal on this important subject, I expect you to be circumspect and prudent. You will not substitute, in the holy place, political discussions for the teaching of religious truths. You will content yourselves, in the sermon, with calling attention in a general way to the duties that I have just indicated, avoiding all declamation and all details which could degenerate into odious personalities and offend any one.[3]

The Bishop of Ghent in a pastoral letter of August 18, spoke in like manner, saying to the faithful:

If you think yourselves happy to have recovered your civil and religious liberty, you should desire with no less ardor that the enjoyment of this liberty be assured you henceforth by wise laws founded on justice. . . . It is, then, a duty for all among you who enjoy the right to vote to take part in forming those assemblies which will exert great influence on the future of our country. You will undoubtedly judge it essential to vote only for those men who combine with other indispensable qualities a respect for the liberty of our holy religion, and the firm will to defend it as well as the interests of the country. It is not without reason that

[3] "Journal de Gand," Aug. 24, 1831.

liberty of religion is regarded as the basis and the guaranty of all freedom.[4]

Mgr. van Bommel, Bishop of Liége, who was soon to become the most prominent member of the episcopacy, above all reproached those who, possessing the suffrage, abstained from exercising it. In his instructions to his diocesans he insisted on the fact that it was not enough to have on paper a Constitution which respected the rights of Catholics. It was necessary to insure the honest application of it. He declared:

There are men who want liberty only for their own ambition and cupidity, tolerance only for their own policies, power only for themselves and their friends, and who, once invested with that power, will everywhere and always attack the Catholic religion and seek to oppress it, because necessarily the Catholic religion will everywhere and always condemn their principles.[5]

The union of the Catholics and the Liberals which had made the Revolution possible had been based on the principle of liberty in everything for everybody. To those who attacked the conduct of the bishops the "Journal des Flandres" was able to reply with reason:

The Catholics, and the clergy in particular, have given proof that, whatever be the particular opinions, whatever be the religious principles of a candidate, that candidate is theirs provided he publicly professes and defends the principle of the Union, provided that he has taken for his rule of parliamentary conduct complete liberty in everything for everybody.[6]

The election took place on August 29 (for certain arrondissements on September 2), amid complete calm.

[4] "Journal des Flandres," Aug. 18, 1831.
[5] "Journal de la Province de Liége," Aug. 27, 1831.
[6] "Journal des Flandres," Sept. 22, 1831.

Those who refrained from voting were numerous, more numerous than the previous year, for the exceptional circumstances which had caused such tremendous interest in the choice of members of the Congress was now lacking. Thus at Liége, out of 1,606 enrolled, scarcely 700 voted, whereas in 1830 there had been 1,543 out of 2,130. But, especially in Flanders, the extension of the electorate by the lowering of the tax-requirement caused an increase in the actual number of voters.

The results of the election suggest some interesting reflections on the state of public opinion. Brussels elected on the first ballot only Joseph Lebeau, whose defeat at Huy, his native city, had been feared.[7] That orator and statesman had impressed himself upon the capital, which knew to what extent he belonged to the entire country. It instinctively placed him above all his colleagues and thus granted him the first reward he had received for his immense services.

Rogier was entirely forgotten at Liége. At Antwerp, where he was governor of the province, he received only 600 votes, and he would have been left at home if it had not been for a third candidacy in the Turnhout district, where he was elected by a narrow margin. Important Catholics such as de Gerlache and Raikem, who shone in the first rank of the Congress, were barely elected on the second ballot at Liége, because of the disappearance of the quasi-unanimity of 1830.

In the smaller districts, however, there was less division of sentiment. At Bruges, for example, Devaux

[7] At the first ballot only those receiving a majority were elected. The remaining places were filled by plurality vote the next Sunday.—*Translators.*

received 442 votes out of 539; at Saint Nicholas, Const. Rodenbach and Charles Vilain XIV had more than 900 out of 1,000 votes cast; at Roulers, Alex. Rodenbach and Abbé de Haerne had more than 500 out of 650; at Arlon, Nothomb was elected by 215 out of 226.

It was at Ghent that the elections were most significant of the country's state of mind. We have already noted the strength of the Orangist party in the capital of Flanders. It dared, in fact, to run candidates openly. In the face of this danger the patriots formed a bloc which won a striking success at the polls. The strongest Orangist candidates got but 475 votes, whereas the patriot senatorial candidates won hands down on the first ballot with 1,566, 1,538, and 1,438 votes out of 2,037. The electorate disavowed counter-revolution. This victory gave to the partizans of the new order such strength that their defeated adversaries soon abandoned the struggle and confined themselves to obscure intrigues doomed in advance to complete failure.

But this bloodless triumph of the Revolution, this express ratification of the work of the Congress, excited no enthusiasm in the country. Belgium was under the depressing influence of defeat. She had lived since the September days in revolutionary exaltation, proud to the point of intoxication over the idea that she had freed herself without foreign aid and in spite of Europe. Now she was aware that her safety was due to foreign bayonets; she knew that only the presence of a French army in the north prevented a restoration. The loss of all her illusions caused her profound suffering. Public opinion, sorely tried, no longer had confidence in any one except the new King, whose prestige was as great as ever. All

the leaders of the Revolution were bitterly criticized, and the responsibility of this one and that for the disaster was passionately sought out. Not a single politician had that sovereign sway over the public which means success. Those elected to Parliament, with some few exceptions, shared this state of mind, so unsuited to the accomplishment of creative work.

The interest of the first session of the Parliament of independent Belgium lies in this. The ministers, still novices, were constantly confronted by the bad effects of the disillusionment which had embittered the national soul. Little by little a select body was formed which by governing acquired a knowledge of government. But it did so despite the obstacles constantly thrown in its path by the representatives of the nation. To follow the conflict is instructive and it may serve as a warning to young States in which popular sovereignty, without proper checks and balances, has been too soon established. Belgian experience proves that during the first years of its independence the parliamentary character of the régime contributed but little to the preservation and development of independence.

Chapter VI

THE BEGINNINGS OF PARLIAMENTARY LIFE

The Parliament elected in 1831 had a brief but eventful existence.[1] Nearly three quarters of the 101 members of the Chamber of Representatives had sat in the Congress. The fundamental views of the new legislature scarcely differed from those of its predecessor, but under the influence of the cruel disappointment of defeat the antagonism already existing between the protagonists of blind resistance to the Conference of London and the partizans of a more prudent policy assumed a harsher character.[2] The majority which had accepted the Treaty of the XVIII Articles, the benefits of which were now refused to Belgium, found itself confronted by an opposition less numerous, it is true, but powerful in the ardor of its convictions and the violence of its language. The Revolution had aggravated the natural inclination of Belgians to defy authority, and the disappointments suffered, since they had thought with a last sacrifice to attain the definite establishment of their independence, had intensified criticism and recrimination.

Most of the important men of the Congress were on

[1] Meeting for the first time on Sept. 8, 1831, it was dissolved Apr. 28, 1833, on the eve of the partial renewal provided for by the Constitution. One half of the members of the Chamber were to be elected every two years.—*Translators.*

[2] E. Banning, "Histoire parlementaire: Patria Belgica," Vol. II, p. 477.

the benches of the new assembly. The Chamber, however, differed from the Congress in certain respects. The aristocracy was less strongly represented in it. Only fifteen deputies belonged to the nobility, among whom Count Félix de Merode, elected at Brussels along with Lebeau and Rouppe, occupied the most prominent position. The clergy supplied but three deputies this time. But the newly elected were far from forming a group distinct from the old members of the constituent assembly. On the contrary, they had been careful for the most part to present themselves to the voters under the patronage of their elders, and it is worth noting that only one district, Nivelles, sent an entirely new delegation.

The relative strength of the parties had changed little. It is difficult to discern the shades of difference in this respect between the Congress and the first Parliament. It seems, however, that the Chamber, without losing its Unionist character, leaned a little more to the Left than the preceding assembly. For example, the ex-president of the Congress, de Gerlache, uncontested leader of the Catholics, whose election had been disputed at Liége, was not automatically reëlected to the presidency. On the first ballot he received but 27 votes to 65 given other candidates. On the second ballot he had 39 votes to 21 for M. Destouvelles. Similarly, in the discussion of the appropriation asked for the erection of the bishop's residence at Bruges, April 21, 1832, there were 40 votes for to 31 against. These are merely indications whose purport must not be exaggerated. Neither the Catholic nor the Liberal party constituted a homogeneous, well-disciplined parliamentary group. In studying the history of this epoch we must bear in mind the remark of a con-

temporary political leader: "Division of opinion was based principally on the manner of looking at foreign affairs, the functions of the Crown under the organic laws, and the development of the administration." [3]

Not quite half of the fifty-one members of the Senate had been members of the Congress. As the qualification for membership was the payment of one thousand florins in direct taxes, it was an assembly of rich men, chosen from a small class of eligibles. The nobility naturally occupied many seats there. In the Senate the line of demarcation between the parties was even less certain than in the Chamber. Unionism ruled there, absolutely. In this cultivated environment, where the conscript fathers sat like members of one family, the controversies that agitated public opinion lost their acuteness. Furthermore, there were in the Senate but few men whose exclusive occupation was politics.

The Constitution assigned the Chambers a preponderant power in the State. Controlling finance by the right to pass or reject the budget, they found their rôle enlarged still more by the enormous legislative task left them by the last article of the fundamental law. The executive had been granted very limited powers, which men who had been through the Revolution were in no way disposed to extend. The King, just settled in Brussels, was a foreigner who had everything to learn of men and affairs. It seemed at first that the complete organization of the Government would be worked out by Parliament, which would in fact direct all policy. Nevertheless, such was not the case. During the two sessions of 1831 and 1832, prob-

[3] Fréson, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

lems of external relations were to the fore, and the directing influence passed, despite the Constitution and despite the spirit of the times, to the executive, the sole agent capable of negotiating with the powers. Lebeau's memorable victory in the Congress had established Belgium's policy. The first pages of our Parliamentary history show us not how the Chambers pursued its realization but how many obstacles they opposed to those men of vision who strove to lead the country along this chosen way.

On September 8, 1831, the King opened the session with an address from the throne, in which he faced optimistically the serious difficulties of the moment. It was necessary, first, to take account of the consequences of the August disaster. The Treaty of the XVIII Articles no longer existed. Belgium lived under a mere armistice, and her international position was uncertain. On October 31 there were laid before Parliament the provisions of the new Treaty of XXIV Articles which the Conference intended to impose on the vanquished. The very existence of the new kingdom was at stake, and no amount of activity in setting up the machinery of its government could conceal the gravity of the crisis.

In Parliament things went better than they had in June. Fortunately, the debates on the Treaty of the XXIV Articles were neither so long nor so violent as those which had preluded the signing of the former treaty. No well-balanced mind could still urge the abandonment of negotiations, to run the risks of war. In the country good sense had regained the ascendancy. The Government, which obeyed the harsh demands of neces-

sity in sacrificing half of Luxemburg and half of Limburg, found a majority—discouraged, disillusioned, deeply wounded in its patriotism and in its pride, but all the same a majority. In the Chamber the old adversaries of Lebeau raged in powerless wrath, but it was not this time an exciting and hazardous struggle in which the fate of the country was at stake. The result was known in advance.

Nothomb was the spokesman of the ministry. That young functionary, clothed with the prestige acquired in the negotiations preceding the accession of the King, was at his best. His speech was unanswerable: for Belgium the question is to be or not to be; in the hour when the Polish Revolution is sinking, not a moment must be lost in introducing the "Victorious Revolution" of September into the public law of Europe and in reconciling its most precious conquests with the governing idea of the treaties of 1815. The force of the reasoning, the elevation of the thought, the practical outlook of the speaker gave his exposition rare power. On November 2 the Chamber docilely resigned itself to the inevitable by a vote of 59 to 38, with 2 abstentions. Belgium thus retrieved a legal title to existence. It was now a matter of obtaining the recognition of the other States and the evacuation of the Citadel of Antwerp and the forts of the lower Scheldt still occupied by the Dutch.

The Prime Minister was a second-rate man whom Lebeau had called to the King's attention when, worn out by the struggles of the Congress and utterly disgusted, the great man of the Revolution had retired to Liége, his work accomplished. De Muelenaere, Deputy from Bruges, Governor of West Flanders, had not played a

very prominent rôle in the constituent assembly, but he had previously had an honorable career in the magistracy and acquired a certain parliamentary experience in the States General prior to the Revolution. In the course of the discussion of the XVIII Articles he had supported the policy of the ministry. On the accession of the King, after the struggle which had profoundly divided the founders of Belgium, he had been selected as a new man who would excite no hostility. Prudent, reserved, taciturn, Muelenaere belonged to that great Flemish bourgeoisie which instinctively mistrusts idealism. With little desire to assume responsibility, he was not the man to coerce Parliament. His ignorance of foreign affairs and his fundamental honesty went very well with a sort of obstinacy which in a country where business experience was lacking passed for firmness.

M. Coghen, a zealous administrator, was Minister of Finance. The portfolio of Justice had been given to M. Raikem, an outstanding member of the Catholic group and a consummate jurist, who had taken a leading part in the tedious committee work of the Congress, through which the details of the Constitution were formulated. His profound knowledge of the law, his broad learning, and his conciliatory spirit brought him again and again the duty of drafting the reports of these committees. He was clearly marked as the man to preside over the elaboration of the great organic laws which were to translate into action the liberal promises of the Constitution.

Charles de Brouckere, called to the Ministry of War in the worst days of August, remained in the cabinet more as a technician than as a politician. This fiery orator had shown himself a leader who knew how to make decisions

and how to command. Intelligent, practical, free from all partizanship, he had taken up in the midst of the debacle the task of reorganizing the army, with vigor and without prejudice. In politics, however, he was not at all in harmony with his colleagues. His enthusiasm for bringing about order and discipline in the army antagonized the Chamber and after a few months he resigned, sickened at having to defend himself like a criminal on the question of a petty supply contract.

The Minister of the Interior was a new-comer, the Chevalier de Theux. This thirty-six-year-old minister belonged, like Raikem, to the Catholic faction in the Congress. He had been the "reporter" of Article 12 of the Constitution and of the electoral law. Cold and reserved, he was a logical and convincing orator, a courageous and prudent minister, and he soon became indispensable.

The diplomatic adjustment of affairs after the disaster had little to do with the history of Parliament. But the defeat gave rise to internal difficulties which we shall discuss more at length, for they enable us to understand the Belgium of that day. In the Chamber, as in the country, a clamorous group obstinately refused to see the underlying causes of the national misfortune. Its wounded patriotism, turned to spite, demanded the pitiless punishment of individuals. Constant appeals to the revolutionary spirit seemed to it the only remedy. Opposed to this minority, with more or less energy, were men enlightened by the troubles of the period. They strove primarily to organize authority and strengthen the State. They knew that lack of power under the Regent had done more harm than treason and incapacity.

A first skirmish took place in the discussion of the address from the throne. On September 15, M. Lardinnois proposed to insert in it a declaration that the army had not done its full duty and that the preceding ministry had been guilty of a grave lack of foresight. Lebeau, wounded to the heart, leaped to the tribune. He had no trouble proving that, coming to power in March in the midst of a confusion known to every one, he could not alone be held responsible for the lack of preparation which had been fatal to the Belgian arms. Despite the murmurs of the assembly, the orator invited his countrymen to return to a modesty too often forgotten since the days of September.

"We were still novices in all those great affairs," he cried. "It is impossible for a new-born nation to acquire at once, in civil and military administration, those high capacities which assure the success of enterprises."

Devaux, more free to defend the old cabinet, insisted on this truth.

"What happened to us," he boldly declared, "was the result of the revolutionary organization of the army. . . . Armies organized in a revolutionary manner carry in them germs of disorganization, of deficiency, germs which develop rapidly, as we have seen." The motion was defeated by a vote of 50 to 16.

On September 25 a more serious engagement occurred. M. Dumortier proposed a Parliamentary investigation of the causes of the defeat. M. Henri de Brouckere was the sole objector, demanding for the executive power the right to discipline those guilty of neglect and failure, and for the judiciary the right to punish. M. Gendebien, pleased with the prospect of an indictment of the Lebeau

ministry, formulated seventy-nine questions to be answered. Under the pressure of public opinion, with that unanimity which is the most frequent sign of servility in assemblies, the investigation was ordered by 63 votes, with 3 abstentions.

On November 6 the Chamber was made to realize that the task of the investigating committee was singularly arduous. To succeed, it would have to be invested with special powers; moreover, one of its members had proposed twenty-one questions raising very delicate technical points and directly involving the King, commander-in-chief of the army. On November 30 they ended the debate. Charles de Brouckere took the offensive. After having shown the abnormal character of an investigation of this sort, he too touched on the real causes of the deplorable events of the month of August: the blind confidence of the country, the lack of foresight and management, the absence of military talent in certain chiefs, called without sufficient preparation to high rank. M. de Muelenaere supported the Minister of War, who could be counted on to initiate the indispensable reforms.

"Beware," he said, very rightly, "of further restricting the royal power. . . . The Belgian people has now as much liberty as it needs. What it desires for the future are order and security." He begged the Chamber not to allow itself to diminish the nascent authority of the executive branch.

Lebeau spoke the next day. He tried once more to set forth the general causes of Belgium's misfortunes which alone were worth examining with a view to hastening the cure:

"The relaxation of discipline in the army; the defama-

tion of public officials of the purest character; party maneuvers; oscillations of every nature; insurrection preached by associations; a press now absurd, now malevolent; the kind of anarchy which reigned under the ministry of the Regent—these were the causes of our weakness and defeat. All this is notorious, yet you wish to establish it by a solemn act and think that what you are doing is to the honor of the country?"

The majority sensed that it would be vain to seek a scapegoat for the faults of the entire régime. By a vote of 48 to 31 it refused the committee the extraordinary powers it requested. The investigation was definitely suspended.

The reaction against the errors of 1830 was not limited to this negative measure; it inspired several laws of public safety. September 17, almost without debate, the Chamber, touching again on one of the worst mistakes of the Congress, authorized the King to make the best use of foreign officers. French officers immediately entered the service of Belgium, and one of them, General Desprez, was named Chief of Staff. It was decided to revise the rank-list made up haphazardly the year before, and the Chamber had the strength to resist the protests of interested parties who desired to confuse their cause with that of the Revolution.

It consented also to grant the executive the means of dealing with malcontents. On October 4 a law was promulgated permitting the seizure of arms and authorizing the searching of homes for contraband supplies. Notwithstanding the danger of an immediate resumption of hostilities, there was still great opposition to rigorous police measures. The law, although somewhat softened in

committee, was actively fought in the Chamber by the future *procureur-général,* Leclercq; and in the Senate important amendments were lost only by a tie vote. A second bill relative to the security of the State had to be withdrawn. The text proposed by the Government permitted the expulsion of foreigners and conferred judicial powers on the head of the Sûreté Publique.[4] This dose was too strong. M. de Robaulx invoked the Holy Office, M. Leclercq the laws of the Directory.

But, despite the failure of this attempt to resort to strong measures, it was apparent that the more far-sighted statesmen were struggling toward the realization of the requirements of a stable government. De Muelenaere and Raikem loudly insisted on the necessity for exceptional laws to cope with the situation, and Lebeau, who had experienced all the impotence of a disarmed Government, dared say without circumlocution:

"Abroad, the executive power in Belgium is thought to be but a *mannequin.* . . . Let us not foster such a belief."

He was actively supported by Count Félix de Merode, who, because of his independence and frankness, took rank among the best political educators of Belgium. He said on October 13:

"You force, by your militia laws and the mobilization of the civic guard, thousands of Belgians to risk their lives for the defense of their country. Do you believe that their blood should be uselessly sacrificed through excessive distrust of the authority charged with watching over the safety of the State? I regret—I avow it openly—the

[4] Sûreté Publique: Police charged with the preservation of public safety.—*Translators.*

article in the Constitution which says that in no case can it be partially suspended. . . . Nothing better in times of peace, assuredly, but when the enemy, and the enemy most dangerous to the very existence of liberty, threatens even at the doors of this hall, can one rigorously observe without exception the forms of the Constitution?" The orator recalled the impotence of the Provisional Government and of the Regent against the conspiracies that had shaken the new régime. It is necessary to arm legitimate authority and to restore military and civil discipline, in order to avoid the repetition of the events we deplore. "If the law which is proposed to you is defective, let us seek to correct it, but let us avoid such big, untimely words as ministerial high-handedness, despotism, inquisition, Holy Office. . . ."

These exhortations were not wasted. Some time later the Government had the audacity to employ an imperial decree of 1811 to place the city of Ghent, where the Orangists had stirred up trouble, under martial law. The Belgians were, little by little, freeing themselves in every domain from the restraint of the doctrinaire revolutionists. Thus, for example, in June, 1832, under the countersignature of Merode, who was bold enough for anything, the Government proposed the institution of a civil and military order. After many vicissitudes the bill was passed by a majority of only two. The incident, of little importance in itself, shows how keen was revolutionary susceptibility. De Gerlache had to endure the bitter reproaches of an ex-member of the Provisional Government for having in his New Year's Day address used the old formulas and "laid at the feet of the King" the deep respect of his "subjects."

The ministers had no easy life, as in the first Parliament. Apropos of an army contract, the opposition provoked a violent debate in which Charles de Brouckere, the indefatigable reorganizer of the army, was overwhelmed with such invective that he became disgusted with his task. He resigned in favor of General Baron Evain, a veteran of the Empire who received full naturalization. The most preposterous petitions were discussed, exhausting the strength and the good nature of the ministers. The discussion of the budget degenerated into an endless series of recriminations. The military expenses and the compensation of diplomatic agents aroused lively criticism, and the Government had to accept numerous reductions in appropriations, very detrimental to Belgium's prestige.

"The debates on this first budget," says M. Van den Peereboom, "which occupied more than forty sessions, were indescribable. They were alternately an echo of the Revolution, for those who had just upset a dynasty did not give two thoughts to reducing to dust the propositions of a ministry; a confusion like that of the tower of Babel, for, although speaking the same language, they often did not understand one another; a course of mutual instruction, for many of the novice members criticized measures and appropriations the absolute necessity of which had to be demonstrated to them. . . ." Experience showed "that it is only the practice of the representative system which can teach assemblies not to overstep their right of opposition, and constitutional ministers not to fail in their duty of resistance." [5]

[5] Van den Peereboom, "Du Gouvernement représentatif en Belgique," pp. 119, 120.

Lebeau, who had an instinct for government, Rogier, who had had a hand in affairs, Nothomb, who already had had some practice in administration, did their best to defend the timid ministers. Obviously the Chamber, forgetting that executive power was no longer in the hands of foreigners, still saw in the cabinet an adversary to hold pinioned rather than a group of chiefs to be aided and upheld. In rereading the debates of the sessions in which the ministers encountered ignorance and consistent hostility, one understands the cry of Brouckere:

"It seems that from the moment a man touches a portfolio he becomes a sort of political pariah."

In June, 1832, the Chamber undertook the discussion of the organization of the judiciary. Counting among its members numerous jurists of prominence, it found itself in a familiar field. It debated at length the question of incompatibility between the functions of deputy and those of Judge of the Court of Cassation. A learned debate arrayed the partizans of a Chamber of Requests against those who desired that the court itself pass on the question of receiving appeals.[6] How capable Parliament would have seemed if its assistance had been required only in fixing the rules which control the functioning of governmental powers—if politics, in a word, had been limited to legal questions! But how different the reality!

On January 31, England and France ratified the Treaty of the XXIV Articles. Russia, Austria, and Prussia, however, delayed their decisions. It was not until early in May that they finally gave their adherence, and then with reservations touching the rights of the Germanic Con-

[6] A Chamber of Requests is a branch of the court which passes on the question of receiving or rejecting appeals.—*Translators.*

federation and implying an understanding with Holland. Immediately there was an explosion of wrath in Parliament, and de Muelenaere was on the point of disavowing Van de Weyer, who had accepted these partial ratifications. On May 12, Leclercq proposed an address to the King, declaring that Belgium would enter into no negotiations before the evacuation of the occupied territory. It was passed unanimously.

Was there to be a rupture with the Conference of London? It was soon known that the King did not wish it. The cabinet offered its resignation and several ministers openly refrained from taking their seats on the government bench. Leclercq was called to the palace, for the King neither would nor could get his way by an assertion of authority. He offered power to the proposer of the address, but the latter declined the burden. Thereupon the cabinet won its first success. Van de Weyer was kept in London and the cabinet recovered its unity. On July 18 de Muelenaere read the decree closing the first session. He was contented with what they had been able to obtain from the powers, but he pledged himself in the most formal fashion not to begin negotiations with Holland until the execution of the Treaty of the XXIV Articles was actually begun. His hands were therefore unnecessarily tied.

Since the opening of the session, whatever the opposition might say, Belgium had made great progress. She had come into being, she had been recognized by the powers least kindly disposed toward her, she had a real army. The judiciary had been definitely organized. The young kingdom no longer cut the figure of a revolutionary State ready to set fire to Europe. All was not pretense in

the instructions given by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on July 24 to Baron de Loë, despatched as an envoy to Vienna. He was charged to win Metternich to the Belgian cause if possible, by showing him that Belgium had become a factor for peace, that she was "monarchical and religious," directed by "principles of order, of conservatism, of stability." [7] There was every reason for believing that the Parliamentary recess would pass without great changes in a situation the still precarious character of which only the initiated understood.

But after de Muelenaere's renunciation of his full freedom of action the King felt less confidence in the cabinet. Affairs were at an impasse, since the Conference of London refused to take immediate coercive measures against Holland. On the one hand, Léopold's marriage with the daughter of the King of the French, celebrated August 9 at Compiègne, further involved the country in the diplomatic system; on the other, the obstinacy of the Chamber drove Belgium toward a warlike solution which very few dared openly to advocate. Muelenaere was so convinced of the necessity of demanding evacuation, as a condition precedent to negotiation, that on August 10 he himself wrote Palmerston, insisting on his "promises on which the country has acted; if I had the will to go back on these engagements, I should not be able to do so." This step gave the British minister an opportunity to repeat most emphatically his advice of prudence. Baron Stockmar added his exhortations to those of Palmerston. "I pray you, M. le Ministre," he said, "I pray you to prefer the

[7] Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Austria I.

well-being of Belgium to any personal consideration." It is certain that the King was not ignorant of these exhortations, which corresponded to his own sentiments. General Goblet, sent to London at the time of the semi-disgrace of Van de Weyer, felt a difference of tone between the instructions he received from the Department of Foreign Affairs and those which came directly from the palace.

In any case, Palmerston, after having conferred with Goblet and Van de Weyer, brusquely proposed to Belgium a new plan of diplomatic action. He urged direct negotiations with Holland, and, to make them more acceptable, he suggested fixing the bases beyond which Belgium could not go. This proposal, which respected the essentials of the Treaty of the XXIV Articles, permitted Belgium to turn the situation to her advantage. King William, at bottom, wanted no traffic with those whom he always considered rebels. He would refuse, in all likelihood, to treat when Belgium showed herself disposed to do so, and this proof of his ill-will would permit the friendly powers to intervene effectually in her favor.

General Goblet, bearer of the propositions known as "Lord Palmerston's theme," arrived at Brussels on September 9. He at once saw Léopold and easily won him to the idea of taking the chance. The cabinet was perplexed, and after several days of hesitation finally declared that it could not go back on the imperative mandate of Parliament. De Muelenaere recognized that the proposed negotiation might be advantageous, but he was not sufficiently convinced to take the responsibility for it or to defend its opportuneness before the Chambers. The King no longer hesitated, and, making one of the most

energetic decisions of his entire reign, he ordered General Goblet to form a cabinet.

On September 18 the general took over the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. Curiously enough, the resigning ministers continued to function in all domestic matters. Their fear of compromising themselves was nevertheless such that not one of them dared countersign the nomination of the interpreter of the royal policy. The Count de Merode, plain member of the Council of Ministers, who took no part in the deliberations of the Government, hurried to the Château de Trelong to perform this legal formality.

General Goblet was forty-two years old. He had the advantage over all the Parliamentary leaders of having treated personally at London with the diplomats of the Conference at the time of the negotiations relative to the fortresses, and of being, for that reason, better able to see the Belgian question from the European point of view. He was known and esteemed at the English Foreign Office, and his former relations with the Prince of Orange, whose aide-de-camp he had been, seemed to designate him for a conciliatory rôle. Well informed, supple, adroit, he had character and independence. A little aloof, perhaps, not sufficiently skilled in the art of handling public opinion, he had nevertheless a great point in his favor: the prospect of defeat did not altogether paralyze his courage and initiative.

Goblet secretly expected that Holland would refuse to negotiate. After that, Belgium could insist upon the evacuation of Antwerp. In a few weeks everything happened as he had foreseen. The Dutch plenipotentiary fled as soon as Van de Weyer had shown his full powers. On the first of October the Conference took action. On the

fifth Goblet asked France and England to carry out their guaranty. They agreed to do so on the twenty-second. On the twentieth, sure of the success of the maneuver, he formed his ministry, in which he was assisted by two men of the first rank, Lebeau and Rogier.

These events took place amid a veritable stupor. The newspapers protested against the change brought about despite the Chambers, the press, and public opinion; but the reserved attitude of the members of the old cabinet, who carefully refrained from giving arms to the opposition, facilitated the transition. Besides, the rapid succession of events, in a time when communication was slow and when newspapers with wide circulation were not in existence, prevented the "die hards" from getting together.

The second ministry of the King was formed with a clear and definite program. All the retiring ministers refusing to enter the new combination, Lebeau took Justice and Rogier the Interior. War remained in the hands of General Evain, who had the position of mere administrator. Lebeau, in agreeing to return to power, gave a new proof of his patriotism and his personal disinterestedness. So as not to lose his seat in the Court of Liége he consented to become minister with only five thousand francs salary. Overcoming the bitterness that his great ministry had left, he became the Parliamentary chief of the new cabinet, always ready to defend the diplomatic tradition of which he had been the initiator. His forceful eloquence, rich in philosophy and experience, made up for the oratorical timidity of Goblet. As under the Congress, he braved unpopularity and, sure of the result, was not afraid to expose himself anew to the

terrible accusation of weakness which had followed him since the Treaty of the XVIII Articles.

At Lebeau's side was his devoted friend Rogier. The young Minister of the Interior was very necessary to this Government, doomed to the most unjust suspicions. As a leader of the September Revolution, his name was a guaranty to those of advanced views. The ex-member of the Provisional Government had acquired in public life and in the administration of the province of Antwerp the maturity he had lacked in 1830. The revolutionist had evolved rapidly into the statesman, convinced supporter of a strong executive and a practical policy. To accomplish what Goblet had undertaken, it was necessary to hold tight the reins of power. A change was imperative, and the official communications of the new ministers mark it so clearly that they fix a date in the consolidation of the régime. Rogier, addressing himself to the governors of the provinces, dared to use this new language:

Zeal, firmness, all the efforts that I expect from you, you will exact in turn from your subordinates. It will not suffice that matters be presented with judgment and impartiality; it will be further necessary that prescribed measures be promptly and completely executed. Within the limits of the law, administrative action must not encounter any sort of hindrance. . . .

Lebeau, in his turn, wrote to the *procureurs-généraux:*

The weakness, the inertia which a Government ought at no time to tolerate in its agents would have to-day consequences too dangerous not to attract particular attention. In a Government all of whose acts must rest on the principle of strict legality, the line of conduct to be followed by public functionaries is clearly traced. They must never exceed the limits of their legitimate authority, but they must know how to exercise that authority with

firmness. After a public upheaval the bonds of the administrative hierarchy are necessarily relaxed. I regard it as one of our first duties to coöperate in tightening them.

On November 15, the very day when the army of Marshal Gérard crossed the frontier on its way to Antwerp, Léopold I solemnly opened the second session of the Chambers. The address from the throne, pointing out the important result of governmental initiative, could hardly fail, it would seem, to satisfy the most obstinate. Vain hope! Although General Goblet had with difficulty obtained the execution of coercive measures against Holland, Belgium was none the less irritated and discontented. This became apparent on November 21, when the discussion of the address began. Certain deputies believed or pretended to believe that Holland would enter into possession of the ceded territories without being constrained to accept the arrangements imposed by the powers on the two belligerents. Others did not understand how the Government had been able to consent to the inaction of the Belgian Army during these decisive events. The siege of the Citadel was, in fact, an operation carried out by France for the Conference; and that power, not wishing to reopen hostilities which had narrowly missed bringing France and Prussia to blows on the side of their respective allies, had formally requested the abstention of Belgium. General Goblet had had to give way—reserving, however, the right to repulse by force any Dutch attack upon the city of Antwerp or the frontier. The Belgian Army was concentrated on the right of the French, ready to intervene at a moment's notice.

It was certainly hard on the self-esteem of a young nation. The country had made great sacrifices for its army. It had repented of its first errors and consented to take foreign instructors. Victim of defeat, it burned with a desire for revenge. But the verdict of Europe was without appeal. Since it had wisely rejected an adventurous policy, it must remain faithful to the diplomatic system and bear the consequences.

In the Chamber the ministers, far from receiving eulogies, had to suffer the bitterest reproaches. At the precise moment when intervention was bearing fruit they were pitilessly denounced for their "anti-national policy," they were exposed to "the imprecations of the country," they were accused of "assassination." During several sessions a vigorous group overwhelmed them with virulent reproaches. Lebeau proudly took up the challenge and on several occasions set forth the true situation, showing that Belgium could not, without committing suicide, abandon the diplomatic path and repudiate the treaty of November 15, the sad result of her disasters. Devaux and Nothomb supported him eloquently. Thanks to their efforts, the coherent and logical policy of the Government was explained in detail. The passions of the opposition must have been tremendously excited not to be silenced by this evidence. Merode audaciously denounced the "braggarts."

The Government, however, was embarrassed by the necessity for pushing the preparations for war, in the event of Holland's deciding to risk everything; besides, it was Belgium's threat of a prompt resort to arms that had won the support of France and England. The ministry had to breathe hot and cold at the same time. From

the Parliamentary point of view this was a source of further weakness. On November 26, to avoid a clearly hostile vote, the cabinet tried to put through an amendment to the address, to the effect that the Chamber suspended judgment on the policy of the ministry. It took the votes of the ministers themselves to keep the Chamber from going farther with its condemnation. The next day the ministry handed its resignation to the King.

Léopold I, who was placed in a most embarrassing position, offered the premiership successively to de Muelenaere and to de Theux, who had somewhat tepidly supported the ministry. They declined. The King next approached a declared adversary of the cabinet, M. Fallon, who had to admit his lack of ability. On December 17 the old ministers resumed their functions. Even the fall of the Citadel did not restore them to favor, and when Parliament voted thanks to the French Army, not one word of gratitude was addressed to the courageous men who had brought about the intervention of the powers and delivered Antwerp from so dangerous a menace.

After the taking of Antwerp, the Parliamentary struggle continued. Holland had, by way of reprisal, closed the Scheldt to allied ships and kept her flag flying on the forts of the lower river. The ministry was blamed for this, and denounced repeatedly for its weakness and lack of skill. It was perpetually under suspicion. The old question of volunteer officers removed for notorious incapacity was again on the carpet. This was foolishly made an opportunity to debate the prerogatives of the executive as contrasted with the rights of the nation.

Count de Merode, with his rude frankness, brought the discussion back to the point.

"I think, gentlemen," he cried, "that more important, more necessary than the punishment of ministers evidently wicked and capricious when they are not cowardly and inept is the maintenance of the powers of government in their respective limits, and above all the preservation of obedience and discipline in the army." The Chamber agreed by a vote of 42 to 23.

The conflict soon broke out afresh. The Chamber, thinking to reënforce Belgium's diplomatic action, wished to put a time limit on the negotiations for the settlement of the Belgo-Dutch question. To indicate its intention it conceived the idea of not voting the war budget, but of making appropriations for only six months. The matter could have been adjusted, for the majority clearly did not desire to upset the ministry; it was content with persecuting it. But Lebeau, irritated, provoked the resignation of the cabinet. The King once more appealed to de Theux and Fallon, but they did not succeed in forming a new cabinet. The old ministers, indispensable because of the inadequacy of their adversaries, once more returned to power. The Chamber adjourned on April 19, and was dissolved on April 28.

For this grave step, taken by the King only after mature deliberation, there were strong reasons. The approach of the elections affecting one half of the Chamber, the importance of events since 1831, the frequency of ministerial crises, the necessity, in short, of establishing greater harmony in the relations between the Crown and Parliament—these arguments the cabinet publicly employed to justify the appeal to the country. But still more

decisive reasons had inspired the dissolution. The "Souvenirs" of Lebeau show us how they were related to the guiding principle of the second ministry in internal affairs.

"The Chamber," says Lebeau, "daughter of the Congress, thought herself omnipotent, and a dissolution would serve to modify this opinion. It was well that public opinion should not be allowed to regard as a dead letter an important prerogative of the Crown." And he adds, "We thought that it might be useful to assert the prerogative, submerged under the preponderance of power which the Congress had bequeathed to the first legislature, . . . and to increase the prestige of the Crown by an act of authority which would show its independence and energy." [8]

The second session which thus suddenly ended had not been fruitful in legislation. Discussions of diplomatic questions and interpellations had occupied the Chamber to the exclusion of the consideration of any great organic law. Even the time for the passage of the budget had elapsed without its adoption. The "Indépendant," in its propaganda for the ministry, could say without exaggeration that the activity of Parliament had been mostly devoted to weakening the ministry, robbing it, through unjust suspicion, of the prestige which alone could render possible the achievements that the nation had a right to expect from it.[9]

The appeal to the country was a final attempt to give the administration the support of a resolute majority. The organization of the State had been progressing little

[8] Fréson, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-179.
[9] "L'Indépendant," Apr. 30, 1833.

by little. In the ministries the best elements of the political personnel were serving their apprenticeship in great affairs. In the army the French generals had fashioned a weapon which won the respect of Holland. At the palace the King constantly exercised a more and more decided directing influence. But nothing durable could be accomplished without the coöperation of Parliament. If the new Chambers should finally decide vigorously to support the Government, there was hope if not of the settlement of the difficulties with Holland, at least of the speedy affirmation of Belgium's independence. The partizans of a rupture with the Conference of London had not the slightest chance of success. The clamorous minority which demanded war, and which based its hopes on a general upset, found more sympathy in the press than in the electoral body, but it spread distrust sufficient to paralyze the cabinet in the diplomatic field.

The men who strove with vision and courage to bring the young Kingdom of Belgium into the European system deserved more general assistance abroad. The best weapon of their adversaries was the extreme forbearance of the powers toward Holland.

The dissolution was Goblet's last card and he made no mistake in playing it.

Chapter VII

THE END OF THE MINISTRY OF 1832

On April 30 Goblet, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, wrote to Van de Weyer:

> We must expect to see the same Chamber return, with the exception of a few men. The ministry must then hope that at the opening of the June session it will have a result to announce. Put yourself sometimes in the position in which we find ourselves here. I cannot sufficiently urge you to keep in mind the necessities which here make themselves constantly felt.[1]

In a despatch of May 4, Goblet said further:

> The circumstances in the interior are of the gravest. The step the King has just taken is the object of attacks by all the papers. The country is agitated, and only by some new achievement will the Government be able to seize that ascendancy which might make the elections favorable or less hostile to it. It is to the interest of the powers themselves to prevent the extremities to which King Léopold might be forced by a Chamber elected under the sway of the irritating influences that surround us.[2]

At the same time that it made this discreet appeal to the wisdom of the statesmen of the Conference, the ministry strove to appeal to public opinion, which until then had shown little confidence in it. In the "Moniteur" of May 9 the ministers stated:

[1] Archives of Foreign Affairs. Goblet's papers.
[2] *Ibid.*, G. B., 1833.

In our opinion the questions that patriotic Belgian electors must put to their candidates are these: Are you of the moderate party? Whether you are Catholic or Liberal matters little to me, you will get my vote. Are you of the *parti exalté?* Catholic or Liberal, it matters little, you will not get my vote. *Exaltation* is excellent for making a revolution, but moderation alone assures its fruits, closes its wounds. The moderate party voted the election of Léopold, the XVIII Articles, the XXIV Articles, cultivates the allegiance of France and England, guards against restoration or partition, and forestalls by its enlightened firmness a catastrophe. . . .

These wise words were answered with redoubled violence and invective. May 23 had been set as the date of the elections. As a precaution, however, the polling was not to be held in the provincial capitals until May 30, in order that the ministers might be rescued in case of local defeat.

On May 21, unfortunately too late to influence the voters, France and England forced the Dutch Government to accept a convention which provisionally settled on a satisfactory basis the relations of Belgium with her neighbor. The latter accepted, finally, the indefinite armistice. The King of the Netherlands did not yet recognize the Treaty of the XXIV Articles. He did not give up the forts of the lower Scheldt, where he still maintained garrisons; but Belgium, on the other hand, remained in possession of the ceded territories of Limburg and Luxemburg and was relieved of any payments on the joint debt until the conclusion of peace. Direct negotiations were to be carried on between the two countries on the basis of the existing treaties. It was, in short, success for the plan that General Goblet had laid out on assuming power. Belgium at last obtained the price of the sacrifices

she had made in signing the treaty of 1831. With the freedom of her river communications guaranteed, she could now await in security the pleasure of the Dutch Government. The partition of her territory had been postponed. Prussia and Austria themselves ceased to support the King of the Netherlands in his refusal to treat with the rebels.

In the hands of a strong Government supported by a disciplined nation and free to maneuver without constantly being accused of weakness or treason, the convention of May 21 could have led to new successes. The elections, however, confined the ministers to a modest triumph. Just as General Goblet had predicted, the new Parliament was very like the old. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Justice were defeated at Tournai and at Huy respectively, and Brussels had to repair these acts of ingratitude. The position of the cabinet would have been greatly compromised if, as Nothomb said, events themselves had not become supporters of the ministry.

One incident of the election was the complete elimination of the Orangists. They were, three years and a half after the Revolution, absolutely incapable of competing in the election. They used the freedom of the press extensively to attack the Government and to vilify the new monarchy, but they did not feel themselves strong enough to brave popular indignation directly either by soliciting votes or by opposing their program to that of the patriots.

The address from the throne, June 7, announced the acceptance by Belgium of the treaty of May 21. The ministry was criticized for the removal of two minor officials

who had opposed the Government. A vote of censure for the dissolution of the Chambers was proposed. The Government, however, secured without excessive difficulty the approval of its diplomatic acts, and at the regular session which opened in November it victoriously defended the military convention of Zonhoven by which the Belgian and Dutch authorities had regulated the passage, across the province of Limburg, of soldiers going to and from the Dutch garrison of Maestricht. The Chambers voted an extradition law, discussed the budgets, and began to study measures relating to provincial and communal government.

The "Indépendant" for August 26 declared:

> For the first time since the Congress the majority has been able constantly to make its will prevail, it has remained united and directed the course of debate. All the efforts of the opposition have been dashed against a rock. This proves what the majority can do, how much time it can save, what services it can render to the dignity of the Chamber and of the country by bringing to an end, when it wishes to, all those idle disputes, all those personal quarrels which disgrace Belgium and deprive her of the benefits she has a right to expect from the legislature.

Belgium lived six years under the provisional arrangement negotiated for her by General Goblet.

It was something short of peace. The Dutch Army continued to be a menace despite the assurances of diplomacy; the mobilized communal guards remained under arms until July 25, 1834; Maestricht was a hostile island in the national territory; the presence in Luxemburg of a German garrison gave rise to constant difficulties. What did the King of Holland want? His obstinacy in not accepting the verdict of the Conference of London, for-

mulated in the name of all the great powers, was for a long time a source of amazement. His stand is easily understood now that we know the real attitude of Russia, Austria, and Prussia toward Belgium. Russia remained hostile; Prussia and Austria, even after they had established diplomatic relations with Belgium, continued to mourn for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. They always saw in the Government at Brussels a revolutionary power whose mere existence was irritating. They did not believe in the future of Belgian nationality.

A war, an unfortunate accident such as the premature death of the King, might have jeopardized everything. The efforts of Belgian diplomacy to secure recognition for the national spirit which vivified Belgium, and to emphasize her real independence from France, met with systematic skepticism, carefully maintained by her enemies. Léopold used all his relations with the courts of Germany to combat these prejudices. He corresponded with Metternich and the King of Prussia, but he could not overcome the surly hostility of these quarrelsome guarantors of Belgian neutrality.

The recently opened archives of Vienna tell us much on this subject. In November, 1833, the arrival in Brussels of ministers from Prussia and Austria was hailed generally as a happy event. What was it in reality? Count Corti recounts in his curious book on Léopold I:

> . . . Metternich had taken care that Austria should be represented at Brussels by a man who was a standing expression of his dislike of the new illegitimate Throne—Count Dietrichstein, the Ambassador, an ultra-Conservative. He was an embodiment of Metternich's system of Legitimacy and pure culture, with a warm personal hatred, not merely of the revolutionary tendency,

but of all new Liberal ideas. His own idiosyncrasies were accentuated by the instruction which Metternich had given him.[3]

Metternich admitted that there was "a certain unity, a nucleus of entente" between the three conservative powers with regard to Belgium, but the diplomat was to keep this thought rigorously secret. Metternich enjoined him to conduct himself as a neutral observer of Belgian politics, but warned him to forearm against the evil influence of Paris, which was filtering into Belgium, even in the guise of religion. France and England, the instructions continue, have at this moment a parallel interest in the creation of an independent Belgium, but "shortly" the entente of the two powers will come to an end and each at the expense of the other will strive to assure itself a preponderant influence. Which it will be, "when the inevitable conflict arises, is of particular interest for us to know and you must give special attention to this problem."

Dietrichstein took this for granted. At Brussels he frequented by preference Orangist circles; he refrained from taking part in the national festivals, and despite the attentions paid him at the court he wrote one day to his master: "The ruler of this country is nothing but a standard-bearer of anarchy, a shield for its propaganda; his kingdom is a nest of intrigue and of conspiracy against the peace of Europe." [4]

No doubt the correspondence of Count d'Arnim, Minister from Prussia, was in the same key. It would, then, be

[3] Egon Caesar Corti, "Leopold I of Belgium; Secret Pages of European History" (English version, Joseph McCabe translator), p. 75.
[4] Cf. Corti, *ibid.*, pp. 76-79.

wrong to believe that the treaty of 1833 would have definitely protected Belgium against the designs of her enemies. It was necessary before all else that the country defend itself and show clearly its will to be an element of peace and order in Europe. With this pressing necessity before one's eyes, the Parliamentary history of the epoch is somewhat disappointing.

At the end of December, 1833, General Goblet, who had failed in an attempt to undertake direct negotiations with Holland, retired from the Government. He was unfit for Parliamentary struggles and in internal affairs Lebeau and Rogier had taken the lead. Count de Merode succeeded him. The ministry, already weakened by the result of the elections, included then but one Catholic member. "The ministry is falling to pieces," wrote Nothomb on January 10, 1834, "but back of the ministry, above the ministry, there is something else that is falling to pieces—it is executive authority, which is disappearing." The executive was the object of such mistrust and criticism that portfolios went begging. "It is well enough," he went on, "to be burgomaster, but no one wants to be minister." And in fact the discussion of the budget had shown that Parliament intended to keep the heads of ministerial departments within narrow limits. For example, on September 6 the Chamber reduced the salary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs 2,500 francs and cut the appropriations for the legations at London and Paris.

At the end of the extraordinary session, a debate suddenly arose which clearly arrayed Catholics against Liberals. The Government had proposed to increase the subsidies granted to schools created and administered by the

communes. The committee to which the matter was referred, speaking through M. du Bus, reported against the appropriation asked, and in Parliament certain deputies supporting its point of view manifested hostility to all state control of education. In their opinion, any favor tending to establish an actual monopoly on the part of schools supported by the public treasury was inconsistent with freedom of instruction. This first skirmish, in which the Government was beaten by a vote of 37 to 28, had this peculiarity: the Liberals defended the constitutionality of subsidies to all schools, and the Catholics opposed any interference of the State in the disputed domain. They distrusted the arbitrary power of the ministry and, in the words of M. Doignon, its "perfidious gifts."

Lebeau had sensed the danger of this fearsome quarrel. He was opposed to dealing with the subject of education while the outside world, "listening with avidity to our Parliamentary discussions, seeks to find in them the justification of the calumnies that a hireling press every day vomits upon Belgium, declaring that we are an unruly people and that independence and liberty are for us but the power and opportunity to hurl ourselves upon one another."

"In my opinion," he said on September 19, 1833, "I believe that a law which, to judge by what goes on in this room, seems destined to arouse so many passions, to divide the Chamber and perhaps the whole country into two camps, cannot be presented to you, except for imperative reasons, at a time when the final sanction of our nationality depends upon our union and perhaps upon events beyond any human foresight."

Léopold shared this opinion; in July he had refused to sign a bill on education for Charles Rogier.[5]

The debate on the subsidies became so acrimonious that on September 18 M. Julien cried out, "The Chamber will henceforth be divided into two camps, the Catholics and the Liberals." The defeat of the ministry emphasized this tendency, showing that the personnel of the cabinet was not in complete harmony with that of Parliament.

The session of 1834 was marked by the discussion of two important laws: the law relating to railroads, and the provincial law. In proposing the construction of a system of *routes en fer,* as they were called then, the Government was actuated by political motives. The Revolution had depressed Belgian industry and ruined the commerce of Antwerp. Here was an opportunity to utilize the new invention to bring back the commerce of the Rhine Valley to the great Belgian port and to facilitate the outflow of Belgian products. It was a good way to appease injured interests and to show that Belgium possessed within herself sufficient sources of wealth. The ministry, urged on by Rogier, triumphed over all objections.

To the King belonged a large share of credit for the success won by the Government. In supporting the project, he followed a plan well worked out in his own mind. He wrote to Metternich on March 18, 1837:

> My system, which consists in turning the attention of men away from sterile political discussions and directing it, on the contrary, to serious and useful enterprises, has succeeded tolerably well. In

[5] Discailles, "Charles Rogier," Vol. II, p. 283.

spite of the numerous external and internal difficulties with which I have had to contend, Belgium stands second only to England from the point of view of economic interests. These are extraordinarily well understood and well handled in Belgium.[6]

The discussion of the provincial law, begun May 6, was less heated. The ministry, always opposed to excessive decentralization, defended with energy and success the right of the Government to annul the acts of the provincial authorities. It would have liked, besides, to give the King power to dissolve the provincial councils. Rogier and Nothomb were eloquent, but unable to convince the Chamber. They put through, nevertheless, administrative and penal precautions against illegal meetings of the provincial councils and of attempts at coalition among them. The provinces had been little sovereign States so recently that there was still reason to fear the awakening of provincial pretensions based on the old order of things. The law passed the Chamber by 50 votes to 11, was ratified by the Senate in 1836, and has since been modified only in detail.

This law definitely established the existence of the permanent deputation, the most original organ of Belgian government and directly descended from her ancient institutions.[7] The influence of the central Government in provincial affairs was reduced to the minimum, and even in so delicate a sphere as the maintenance of order, the governors (appointed by the crown), although charged

[6] Archives of Foreign Affairs. Correspondence of Léopold with Metternich.

[7] The permanent deputation is a committee of the provincial council which exercises important powers in the interim between sessions of the council. We would call it the "executive committee" of the council.—*Translators.*

with the duty of enforcing the laws, were not clearly given the right to make police regulations. From several points of view the gears were poorly meshed, and the uncertain character of the hierarchic relations between the authorities recalls the unskilful dispositions of the French Constitution of 1791.

"The greatest wrong that the old Government did to the country," wrote Lebeau on May 16, "was to excite such distrust that for a long time it will not be possible to discuss with impartiality questions which relate to the executive power." And the Minister of Justice added this profound word: "Every one protests his love of order; I believe that it is the same on all the benches, but it may very well be that one has love of order in the heart and anarchy in the head."

The Congress had too often thought that liberty was all-sufficient. The new State had been systematically deprived of the means of defense with which governments had always provided themselves. The administrative organization no longer resembled the strong structure set up by Napoleon after the great upheaval. There were no state police. Jury trial was established in all cases involving the safety of the State; no special legislation had been enacted to punish treason. A Government which does not defend its principles merely plays the dupe. In excessively disarming the authorities charged with preserving the common safety, Liberal romanticism had unconsciously made a dangerous concession to the evil forces from which society had suffered.

Orangism was in 1833 still a danger which it was imprudent to underestimate. We have seen how precarious Belgium's external relations still were. At home a little

group of agitators against the régime were inconsolable because the Revolution had given birth to a conservative kingdom, about to become an important element in European order. The King of Holland maintained at great expense a venal press which poured abuse on the Government. He spent secretly in Belgium, to combat the new Government, a sum estimated at twenty-one million francs. In addition, the Revolution had undoubtedly injured some legitimate interests, and among the industrial leaders of Liége and Ghent and the merchants of Antwerp the demise of the Kingdom of the Netherlands had left understandable regrets. The administration and the army, hastily organized, included men who were not above listening to the solicitations of the late Government. A fraction of the aristocracy exhibited, moreover, after the fashion of the French aristocracy, a distaste for a royalty of the barricades.

Orangism united, then, some rather ill-assorted elements. The masses turned from it with horror, and on several occasions, at Ghent and Antwerp, they had indicated by violence their animosity to anti-patriotic intrigue. A sly conspiracy existed nevertheless, and in September, 1833, known Orangist emissaries betook themselves to London to get in touch with foreign diplomacy. The movement was in no way a Flemish reaction against the preponderance of the Walloon element in the Government. On the contrary, the clergy of Flanders stood at the head of the patriots.[8] Suddenly, in April, 1834, serious occurrences revealed the necessity of closer watch upon the enemies of the State.

[8] Cf. de Bavay, "La Révolution belge," p. 316.

On March 20 the Prince of Orange's stud, which had been previously confiscated, was sold at Tervueren. A subscription had been secretly taken up to purchase several prize horses and offer them to the Prince, who had enjoyed a real popularity in Belgium. Four were thus acquired and sent to Germany, and thence to Holland. Some notorious Orangists had used this as the opportunity for a "manifestation" and others had unwisely joined them in the belief that it was a personal tribute, without great political significance. Was it not permissible to tease a Government which the most ardent patriots did not hesitate to vilify remorselessly? On April 2 the Orangist papers blaringly published the names of the subscribers, seeking to create the impression that it was nothing less than an imposing expression of the national will. In response a riot broke out in Brussels on April 6. The mob sacked the residences of a few subscribers. The public authorities remained inactive, and under the almost indifferent eye of the communal police and the civic guard there occurred in miniature something similar to one of those *journées* which cast such discredit on the July Monarchy.

The rioters were not actuated by revolutionary passion, but one never knows what a mob may do. The Government, surprised, shackled, poorly seconded by the civil authorities, could not at once meet the situation. But it rapidly recovered itself. On April 6, as the disturbances seemed to be taking a menacing turn, and as the belief grew that they might have been deliberately provoked, the Government had the courage to abandon strict legality and by decision of the Council of Ministers to assign to the military the task of restoring calm in

the capital. Reënforcements arrived from Louvain and Malines, and Brussels was for several days under martial law.

The alarm had been serious. It was not that the damage had been grave, but the presence in Belgium of French Republicans aroused dread of one of those bold strokes so much feared in France. A conflict between the mob and the soldiers was big with possibilities. "We know positively," wrote Count Félix de Merode to Van de Weyer, "that the Republican refugees in Belgium and certain Orangists were waiting for this diversion." [9]

It was feared, too, that an account of the disturbances at Brussels, maliciously exaggerated, would injure the reputation of Belgium abroad. The Minister of Foreign Affairs hastened to send on April 8 a detailed account of the occurrence to the Belgian representative at London. After having explained the real character of the riot, Count de Merode stressed the fact, scarcely believable abroad, that maintenance of order in the capital depended upon the communal authorities. He commented upon the Belgian law, which he did not hesitate to characterize as "perhaps too liberal." He said:

> The Government must seize this opportunity to ask for stronger laws; in the state of public opinion the sad events of Sunday were necessary to convince every one of the weakness of the existing legislation. The Government must be able not only to repress disturbances but to prevent them by expelling from the country foreigners who are here only to promote sedition or to profit by it.[10]

[9] Archives of Foreign Affairs, G. B., Vol. VI.
[10] *Ibid.*

A few days later Count de Merode announced to Van de Weyer a series of expulsions. Van Praet wrote by order of the King a very interesting letter to the same ambassador on the part taken by the diplomatic corps at Brussels in the Orangist movement. Léopold's secretary stated:

The best minds and the most impartial persons cannot help believing that there has been, in the intimacy existing between the foreign diplomatic corps at Brussels and the avowed chiefs of the Orangist party, a sort of encouragement and support given to their inexplicable proceedings. I mean to speak with reserve on such a delicate subject, but one on which the King does not wish me to keep silence with you. . . . I am far from believing that there was political sympathy, approval, or reasoned and serious rapprochement on the part of the diplomats. There were rather close social relations and nothing more. But considering its effect on public opinion, that was much. You know as well as I do that the salons of the patriotic aristocracy at Brussels are ordinarily closed, that sociability is not our forte, and that on the other hand it happened that Orangist society was at home every evening, that it included several agreeable young women, and that the diplomats became quite naturally habitués of their salons.

Van Praet then enumerated the social relations of the British minister and of the envoys of Prussia and Austria:

The envoys of Prussia and Austria associate intimately with the Trazegnies, the Lalaings, and the Prince de Ligne. Sir Robert does as much. He invites them to dine, not too often, but sometimes. It is on this account that d'Oultremont and Mercy said to Duval, arrived from Paris, that everything was at an end, that diplomacy was in accord with the friends of the house of Orange, because the English ambassador gives them diplomatic dinners. Sir Robert is in a state of extreme exasperation over what has taken place. Dietrichstein and d'Arnim must have already written

to their Governments that the Belgian Government has been an accomplice in or an indifferent spectator of the recent events. They express themselves in this manner in public. Mme. de Lalaing has been received at the British Embassy, as well as the Prince de Ligne and M. d'Overschie. Mme. de Lalaing was at the windows of the embassy while the home of the Prince de Ligne was being sacked, and the latter was strolling about town on Hamilton's arm Monday morning.

I remember hearing, when the German diplomats arrived, that they would furnish a center around which the Orangists could unite. These words have come true and the Orangists have made the most of this patronage.[11]

In Parliament the ministry sustained a flood of unjust criticisms. The opposition, which had never ceased to hamper the Government and to oppose the organization of an effective police, accused the ministers of having been accessory to the disorders. Charles Rogier proudly took up the challenge at the meeting of April 25.

"If executive authority is weak in Belgium," he cried, "each of you at the bottom of your soul knows the cause of it." He called attention to the organic laws which were awaiting passage by the Chamber. He emphasized the hostility it had shown each year to the secret service, for which not more than fifty thousand francs was available, and that obtained with great effort. He showed how little control the central Government had over local and presumably subordinate authorities.

Devaux summed up the debate, on April 28.

"We must abstain from exalting unbridled passions," said that experienced Liberal. "We must keep from giving the people exaggerated ideas of their power and their

[11] Archives of Foreign Affairs, G. B., Vol. VI, No. 63.

rights. We must not discredit every man in power, every act of authority; we must not bind power with a thousand legal chains, with a thousand moral shackles. We must leave authority the legal and moral force essential to make itself respected and obeyed. We must recognize that if liberty dies for lack of sufficient guarantees, society itself dies for lack of order. Finally, we must recognize frankly, openly, that our political position has changed since the Revolution; that we must undoubtedly preserve religiously all the liberties we have acquired, but that to-day there is no longer any real danger, except the danger to order."

An address deploring the excesses committed was voted and sent to the King. The Government, sure this time of being supported, introduced a bill intended to repress Orangist intrigues. It was easily passed on June 9 by 60 votes to 4.[12]

Parliamentary life in the early days of independence was very different from what it is to-day. All the members of both houses lived in the capital during the session; for the most part they knew one another intimately; despite the violence of debate, the bonhomie natural to Belgians maintained among them relations of perfect courtesy. In the Senate, where the aristocracy dominated, there was almost a family atmosphere. A contemporary French observer has given us a picture of it mingling truth and satire with quaint charm:

The place in which the "Peers of France" of Belgium meet is a rectangular room with three windows, and exits at the two extremities. A horseshoe-shaped table is occupied by the fifty mem-

[12] Law of July 25, 1834, in force until 1839. *Pas.*, 1834, p. 150.

bers of the Senate. In the summer the ministry turns its back to the fireplace and looks at the president; in winter the ministers show their shoulders to M. de Strassart and warm their feet. The president is seated in the middle, opposite the Government, between the two doors, in the draft.

Altogether it has an air so commercial, so bourgeois, so straitened, it recalls so shabbily the ship-owner's counter or the notary's office, that it is necessary to look frequently at the bust of King Léopold to be reminded that one is in the presence of his legislative body. By torch-light in the winter, the Belgian Senate must seem a counterfeit of the "Société philotechnique."

But the dignity of the chamber, lost in its architecture, is restored by the furniture; from the windows, the chairs, and the tapestries the colors of the nation burst forth. They serve as curtains, stools, taborets, and patriotic backgrounds for the Senators, who consume a prodigious number of glasses of sugared water, the sole luxury that the members permit themselves. The most rigorous economy prevails in all other details. . . .

Economy goes farther. It imposes privations so minute that there is a Spartan virtue in enduring them. In climbing the marble stair, stop on the landing just before you reach the chamber. There, back of a glass partition, they have contrived a separate office by means of a screen. The leaves of the screen after a fashion conceal two chairs worth together thirty sous. It is true that the purpose of the chairs is not magnificent. . . . This screen has played an active rôle in certain debates. You must know that the opposition counts but a single member in the Senate, M. Lefèvre-Meuret. When the discussion turns to the advantage of the ministry, which often occurs, M. Lefèvre rises and says very gravely to his colleagues, "Gentlemen, the opposition, not being free, abstains from voting and withdraws into its conscience." With these words the honorable member goes behind the screen. . . .[13]

Everything seemed calm in Belgium, when suddenly, on August 1, Lebeau announced to the Chamber the resig-

[13] E. de Beaulieu, "Vie politique des Belges" in the "Revue de Paris," 1835, p. 328.

nation of the ministry. This caused extreme astonishment, and since no Parliamentary incident had provoked the retirement of the cabinet, new and inadmissible demands of foreign diplomacy were suspected. The ministers denied this explanation without otherwise justifying their departure. At once disagreement with the Crown was rumored. Only long after was a positive explanation forthcoming. Lebeau and Rogier had for some time desired to get rid of General Evain, Minister of War, whom they found little fitted for the rôle of a Parliamentary minister and too much inclined to flirt with the adversaries of the cabinet; they had, without referring the matter to the King, sounded out another general as to his willingness to replace their colleague. Léopold was much displeased.

"From that time on," recounts Lebeau in his "Souvenirs," "our relations with the Crown became daily less easy. The evidences of good-will of which Rogier and I frequently had been the object gave way to an unmistakable coldness." General Evain, a veteran of the Empire, had come from France to reorganize the Belgian Army, and, in order that he might be made a minister, he had been granted full naturalization. The King meant to keep him. He hoped to maintain the Minister of War, who did not sit in the council, in a peculiar position, dependent only upon himself, and it was not without resistance that he later accepted, in the domain of military administration, the principle of ministerial solidarity.

"You will notice," wrote Charles Rogier to his brother, on the day following his resignation, "that the new ministry has not yet a Minister of War and that one of the causes of the King's dissatisfaction was our insistence on

having the Minister of War a member of the council and a Belgian if possible." [14]

There were still other reasons for the fall of the ministry. The cabinet of 1832, formed on the initiative of the King to rescue the country from the diplomatic quicksand in which it was about to sink, included only one member of the Right Center. To facilitate the passage of the great organic laws, it was desirable to accord Catholic opinion a more marked influence in the Government. De Muelenaere and de Theux seemed disposed to reënter the ministry. The latter had acquired increasing influence by the part he had taken in the principal legislative labors of the session. The disagreement between the Crown and the cabinet only hastened an event already in the air.

Belgium lived until 1839 in the shelter of treaties negotiated by the Goblet ministry. This fact alone would suffice to establish the reputations of the men who brought about the Antwerp expedition and the establishment of the modus vivendi with Holland. But the work which they had accomplished in the interior deserves no less praise. Lebeau, Rogier, and Count de Merode gave proof of statesmanship in those years when the country was regaining its balance. They had the courage to brave unpopularity and constantly sought to strengthen the State. They have been reproached for having misconceived the principles by which the Congress had been animated. They were specially accused of not having the same faith in decentralization as the constituent assembly. These reproaches, with which the press of the time were filled, will not stand an impartial examination. One can-

[14] Discailles, "Un diplomate belge à Paris," Vol. I, p. 140.

not forget that after the Revolution there remained much to do to make Belgium capable of enduring. Executive authority, although it was no longer in the hands of a foreign ruler, was constantly resisted by the tendencies which had always made the Belgians hard to govern. Moreover, it was a time when liberal ideas were in the air, all the more so in Belgium because the spirit of the day was not restrained by any governmental tradition.

Conway wrote on July 2, 1834, to the King:

> Two things strike me which are not sufficiently appreciated. The first is the excellent attitude of the people, of the majority of the nation, and, alongside of it, the weakness and indifference of those who ought to put it to profit—that is to say, the men in power, on every rung of the administrative ladder. Everywhere laziness and carelessness dominate, everywhere spirit and determination are wanting. Yet energy and devotion in those invested with power are the sole conditions of its survival in the weakness to which our organic laws have reduced it.

The "Indépendant," which defended with much patriotism and clear-sightedness the work of the founders of the State, was right in 1834 when it said:

> Authority is in danger and threatens to decline if upright people do not take a hand. Let us give it, then, the succor of our arms, our strength, and our convictions. The post of honor is beside it, for the enemy assails it and presses it from every side. Misfortune to him who abandons it, cowardly and pusillanimous whoever blushes to defend it.[15]

[15] Feb. 5, 1834.

Chapter VIII

THE ROYAL GUARDIAN

In this reviving Belgium, still agitated by revolutionary passions, tormented by illusions, bruised by cruel deceptions, Léopold I had, as we have seen, assumed a rôle much greater than that which the Constitution had assigned to the monarch. Dangers of every kind threatening the life of the young State had imposed on the King a task no one else in Belgium could perform. The authors of the Constitution had had no suspicion that the Prince whom they selected to exercise the very limited powers of the Crown, because as a foreigner he might be expected to be neutral and impartial, would make for himself so influential a place in the Government. They dreamed of a monarchy patterned after the régime of the simple-hearted Regent Surlet—a monarchy without authority and without pomp, in which the personal will of the sovereign would have no visible effect.

The very day of Léopold's inauguration the "Courrier des Pays-Bas" undertook to advise the new ruler to walk in the footsteps of the ephemeral chief who with his retiring conduct and his bourgeois manners had for some months embodied the current conception of sovereignty. Surlet, said the patriotic organ,

> is a man whose experience and wisdom can be a great help to him; a citizen whom grateful Belgium will always regard with respect

and admiration. Let the Prince often take counsel with this worthy old man and he will be certain to gain for his acts the popularity of him who has governed us for six months without incurring the least reproach!

The ink was scarcely dry on this article when the stupid errors committed under the régime of the "good" Regent had borne their fruit. Faced with an almost hopeless situation, the King found himself obliged to exercise, in the diplomatic, administrative, and military domains, a direct and personal influence. He conducted negotiations with the powers; he communicated almost daily with Van de Weyer in London, with Lehon in Paris; he received continually the diplomats accredited to Brussels, Sir Robert Adair, General Belliard, Count de La Tour-Maubourg; he presided over the Council of Ministers like a man long versed in important affairs; he personally directed the reorganization of the army.

The King was a master workman among would-be statesmen who were still serving their apprenticeship. He was an expert, as we should say to-day, and this superiority gave him a definite advantage at the outset. He was, moreover, prudent, tactful, and eager for the realities of power rather than its external attributes. Stimulated by a lofty sentiment of duty, he made himself indispensable and thus at once acquired the maximum of authority and influence allowed by the Constitution. Léopold I was the guardian of a nation which had not yet attained its majority. He wrote on August 24, 1831, to his friend Lord Durham:

Here the situation is such that I must constantly attend personally to matters which are really the business of almost any one

other than the head of the Government. But as everything is naturally in its infancy, there is nothing astonishing in the fact that most men of affairs are no better than children.[1]

He himself studied all diplomatic notes, drew up instructions for the legations, and conducted diplomatic maneuvers with a sure hand. The ministers responsible to Parliament thus became used to control by royal authority.

On November 16, 1831, for example, the King reprimanded the premier for submitting too easily to Parliamentary control, writing to him:

> I see by the newspapers that the committeemen named by the Chamber continue to propose many changes in the administration. This step is entirely unconstitutional. It is not right for the legislative power to take the initiative in matters which should originate with the executive power. As this procedure would force upon the executive power the disagreeable necessity of refusing its approval to measures proposed by the Chambers, I desire that my ministers positively oppose its continuance. I must at the same time recall to the ministers collectively that branches of the administration must not be abolished unless the question has been previously submitted to me.[2]

His prerogatives were for Léopold I not trappings of vanity, but tools of which he did not intend to be deprived. He insisted that they be respected. On December 7, 1836, he wrote to de Theux: "In everything, however unimportant, it is the duty of the minister, before committing himself to a definite policy, to report to the King

[1] Letter of Léopold I to Lord Durham, quoted by Buffin in "La Révolution belge et la campagne des Dix jours," Vol. II, p. 565.
[2] Juste, "Le comte de Muelenaere," p. 38.

in order to learn his opinion. The minister has authority only in that he is minister of the King." [3]

In these early and difficult times Léopold was aware that he held everything in his own hands. He who later willingly yielded to the lure of travel scarcely dared in 1832 to be absent from the country a few days. "For Belgium as she is at present," he informed Lehon during the negotiations relative to his marriage, "I am the State. It is, then, not a matter of indifference to the Belgians whether I am away or not, and there would be terror if I went as far as to Compiègne." Said he on another occasion, "I am the Atlas upon whom rests our little kingdom." [4] In such uncertain times the man was as necessary to the country as was his office.

A caprice of destiny had made of the Prince of Saxe-Coburg, long before his accession, the enemy of the house of Nassau. First in 1816 he had triumphed over the Prince of Orange by taking from him the heiress of the throne of England, to whom that Prince was already betrothed. Now Léopold snatched the half of Nassau's kingdom. The King of Holland, with clear-eyed hatred, considered the person of the new King the most serious obstacle to his plans for restoration. Orloff wrote to Nesselrode on March 14, 1832:

> He considers the choice which has raised Prince Léopold to the throne of the new State as most disadvantageous to his interests, because that Prince, protected by England, would have a chance of maintaining the political existence of Belgium even if the circumstances under which the State was formed should disappear.

[3] Corti, "Leopold I of Belgium," p. 96.
[4] Juste, "Le comte Lehon," pp. 96, 104.

The Russian diplomat, in explaining the sentiments of the Dutch monarch, expressed as his opinion that this idea "is one of the principal causes for his refusing his adherence to the Treaty of London." [5]

William I was not mistaken. Léopold was a living bond between Europe and insurgent Belgium. France and England had agreed upon him. He strengthened his position in this respect by contracting a direct alliance with the family of Orléans. The marriage of the King with one of the daughters of Louis-Philippe was demanded by the situation; this union was eagerly desired in Belgium; the Congress had anticipated such an alliance as a happy compromise following the defeat of the candidacy of the Duke of Nemours for the throne. Léopold, upon his election, had welcomed the idea, but Talleyrand, like all those who cherished secret hopes of conquest or of partition, was reluctant to strengthen the young dynasty by the gift of a French princess. It was only in August, 1832, after many vicissitudes and repeated negotiations, that this marriage, of such great political importance, was concluded at the Château of Compiègne.

The advances of the Coburg of Belgium to the July Monarchy ranked him clearly among the upstarts upon whom the old courts of the Continent believed it their duty to look darkly. The King strove, however, to win them. Despite the refusal of Russia, Austria, and Prussia to enter into regular diplomatic relations with the Government of Brussels, Léopold I, profiting by his long-standing personal relations with the statesmen of Germany, began corresponding with them. In particular he

[5] Colenbrandner, *op. cit.*

PRINCE LÉOPOLD OF SAXE-COBURG IN 1816
(*After the original drawing by G. Hayter*)

insinuated himself into the favor of Metternich. With the imperial Chancellor, who embodied the reactionary spirit, the sovereign elected by the Belgian Revolution naturally had little prestige.

"The Belgian affair," said the old statesman, stiffly, "is a horror to my august master."

Léopold, however, strove to win him over. While passions still were boiling, taking Metternich on his weak side, he boldly represented himself as the restorer of monarchical and religious order and attempted to prove to the Chancellor that the Belgian Revolution had not been merely a reflex of the July Revolution in France. He emphasized the strong position acquired in the country by the Church. "Therefore," said he, "its partizans are whole-heartedly devoted to independence and are ready to make the greatest sacrifices in order to remain Belgians. Nothing is more remarkable than the difference that exists between France and Belgium; here religion exercises its salutary influence and there is no trace of republicanism." [6] And when diplomatic relations were established between Belgium and the court of Vienna, the King wrote personally to Metternich these words which would have caused an uproar in the Chamber: "I recommend the Baron de Loë to your favor. He has nothing in common with the Revolution or with revolutions and will never be anything more than the representative of his master."

"We are too far from Austria to be able to awaken there much interest," wrote the King some years later, "and yet these provinces have often become the source

[6] Corti, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

of general discord. . . ." And, adopting a line of argument quite beyond his correspondent's range of thought, he observed:

To the Catholic States, on the contrary, we are of great importance, because we are the only State in which the Catholic principle acts quite freely, uninfluenced by the Government, and because it is consequently of the highest importance to know whether the Catholic principle, which has been believed up to the present to be so monarchical, really is so in practice.[7]

Little by little the relations became less strained. Russia, Austria, and Prussia, however, regretted that circumstances had obliged them to recognize what had happened at Brussels as an accomplished fact. Blind to their true interest, they did not realize that they should have sought to strengthen the young State instead of disputing with it in detail over its means of existence. The Austrian Foreign Office was slow of comprehension and regarded as a mere pretense the boldly national policy practised from 1831 on by Lebeau. Léopold, in order to make himself understood, put the dots on the i's. He wrote shrewdly to Metternich on July 25, 1831:

I have come here, indeed, to prevent Belgium from falling wholly or partially into the hands of France. If it is desired to avoid this happening in the future, one must not on the one hand seek to deprive Belgium of all its means of existence while, on the other, loading it down with the debts of its neighbor. All the powers, not even excepting Russia, are interested in having Belgium live independent and happy, because then, as has been the case so far, she can in no manner become French. If, on the contrary,

[7] Archives of Foreign Affairs. Correspondence of Léopold I with Metternich, Feb. 17, 1836.

they make of her independence a torment, it is easy to see that she will not last.[8]

This correspondence, which entailed the exchange of letters eight and ten pages in length, went on for a long time and was important in view of the constant ill-will of the Austrian ministers at Brussels.

The King also corresponded very intimately with a Prince of the imperial house, the Archduke John, and these various relations enabled him to plead the Belgian cause where other advocates were not heard. He insisted always on the necessity of giving Belgium a chance to live. "For us," he wrote on March 27, 1839, "the dangerous legacy-hunter is France. There are two methods: conquest or alliance and domination. England would not concede the first. The second is more dangerous. The best guaranty against it is the love of the country for its independence."

There were many prejudices to conquer, and it was only very slowly that success was attained. Beginning with 1836, however, favorable changes were to be observed in German opinion. The Marquis de Rodes wrote the King on August 22, 1836:

> I cannot prevent myself from expressing to your Majesty how much my enjoyment of my journey along the Rhine with my son and of my stay at the waters of Baden-Baden, whence I have just returned, has been enhanced by the favorable manner in which your kingdom is beginning to be regarded by the leading men of the various countries assembled there. As it is to the lofty wisdom and prudence of your Majesty that Belgium is indebted for this change in her favor, I am happy, sire, to have been able to observe it.[9]

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Papers of Viscount de Conway.

Léopold I had very clear and individual ideas on the subject of government. He understood, he even admired, the complex mechanism of parliamentary monarchy, but his intelligence, free from all prejudice, had put him on guard against the fashionable illusions of that period. It is known that he distrusted the Belgian Constitution; it had been conceived without the help of the monarchy. On several occasions, up to the end of his reign, he showed in his intimate letters that the fear he had experienced in London in 1831 persisted in his mind. But, although the reign of George III had furnished him a model of what a constitutional king should not be, he had understood from the start that Royalty had an important function to perform above the parties. He wished the Crown to play an active part. In 1835 he wrote to the Archduke John:

> My Lower House bothers me at times with a mania for restricting the Royal power within the *lois organiques*. As a rule, however, with a little patience we win. The modern French say, *"le roi règne, mais il ne doit pas gouverner."* I, in my smaller sphere, think it is necessary for him to do both.[10]

But the conduct of Léopold had nothing in common with that of the clumsy rulers of Vienna, always in revolt against the spirit of their time. Despite the advice the Austrian envoys lavished on him, he took care not to identify himself with any party. He relied above all on his own skill and perseverance to remedy the recognized defects of the régime. "Here we suffer from ultrademocratic forms," he said in April, 1845; "which is a pity, because, al-

[10] Corti, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

though it loves freedom, this country is *not* democratic." [11]

He would have wished also to find among the Catholics firmer coöperation in the constant struggle which the executive power kept up to strengthen its position. The King explained himself clearly on March 18, 1837:

> They have, for example, done everything to make the communal law and the provincial law as bad as possible, and they are set upon weakening the royal power. I have said to them all the time, "You are committing suicide. The Government is your most faithful and benevolent friend; you are working against yourselves." Experience is beginning now to teach them bitter lessons.[12]

At another time he wrote:

> Here we have a quite superfluous struggle of Catholics and anti-Catholics. The former are our most fervent Nationalists; the latter rather stand for the system of the late King William. There is a good deal of childishness on both sides. We should, however, suffer little from it if we had not to have a Parliamentary election every two years.[13]

And the King good-naturedly concluded, "Our Constitution is absurd!" But he regarded it as a fact. Moreover, its fundamental principles appeared reasonable to him: the sovereignty of the people, the equality of citizens before the law, the liberty of worship, and the freedom of the press (accompanied by means of punishing its abuse) seemed to him just and wise. He admired very much even the organization of financial con-

[11] Corti, *ibid.*, p. 157.
[12] Archives of Foreign Affairs. Correspondence of Léopold I with Metternich.
[13] Corti, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

trol by the Court of Accounts.[14] All that he asked was that the portion of authority assigned to the Crown be maintained and unfailingly defended by his ministers.

We may profitably study at closer range the principles and methods of a King who managed so skilfully the complex system of parliamentary monarchy. The letters of Léopold to Victoria constitute, as it were, a course in which the experienced sovereign sets forth for the instruction of the young Queen the secrets of his trade.

This foreign prince, who had been transplanted first to England and then to Belgium, wished above all that the monarch be intensely national. It is the primary, great, and urgent advice which he gives to Victoria. "To be *National,*" he wrote on June 30, 1837, "is the *great thing,* and I was sure you would agree with what I said repeatedly to you on this *vital subject,* and you will be certain in this way of the *love* of the nation you govern. . . ." "The great thing," he wrote again, "is to be the *National* Sovereign of your *own* country, and to love its very faults. This strengthens the *mutual attachment,* and that can *never be too strong.*" [15]

With the same freedom he made similar recommendations to his French relations-in-law at the time of the negotiations relative to the marriage of the Duke of Orléans. "It is very important," he wrote to Thiers on August 6, 1836, "that the union which the royal Prince is about to contract shall leave him quite clearly and

[14] Corti et Buffin, "Maximilien et Charlotte," Vol. II, pp. 199-204.

[15] July 12, 1838, a fortnight after her coronation. All references to correspondence between Léopold and Victoria are to "The Letters of Queen Victoria," edited by A. C. Benson and Viscount Esher, in which the letters are arranged chronologically.—*Translators.*

definitely a French prince, acting in the true interests of his country. The strength of the royal family is in France." [16]

Léopold made himself thoroughly Belgian. He gave up his English attendants, and of his former household he retained only a few domestics. The important duties about the court were confided to prominent members of the Belgian aristocracy, and the oldest families of the country, like the Merodes and the d'Arschots, were at once much in evidence at the palace. His aides-de-camp were chosen from among the best officers of the army and from all ranks of society.

To help him in political matters the King had, first of all, Jules van Praet. Before leaving London he had singled out this young man of twenty-five years as already ripe for important affairs and entrusted to him the direction of his secretariat. Chief of the royal household from 1841 on, van Praet was during Léopold's entire reign the direct collaborator, counselor, and confidant of the King. He performed his delicate task with alertness, loyalty, and disinterestedness which won for him in the political world a conspicuous place. Broad culture, a thorough knowledge of men and things, reserve and discretion in every situation peculiarly fitted him for his duties. Van Praet scrutinized the thoughts of others without revealing his own—without revealing, above all, those of his master. Amiable and gracious manners, a light irony which discouraged intruders, a rare talent for conversation, and an enlightened taste for the arts helped to make this man sprung from the lower middle class both a cour-

[16] Lansac de Laborie, "Correspondances du siècle dernier," p. 241.

tier and a statesman.[17] He was on friendly terms with men of the Revolution like Lebeau, Rogier, and above all Devaux, his brother-in-law. His personal relations, quickly extended to include all the political circles and the best salons of the capital, made him an invaluable source of information.

By van Praet's side, to manage the business of the civil list, the King had placed another Brugeois, Edward Conway, in 1853 created Viscount de Conway. Born of a noble Irish family recently settled in Belgium, Conway also kept his post at the palace throughout the reign. In the very intimate duties he performed at court he displayed not only absolute devotion but notable judgment and independence of mind. Léopold consulted him often. His personal opinions allied him with the Conservative party, and he kept the King minutely informed regarding the views of the Right as van Praet did of the Left.

The affectionate confidence with which the King honored these chosen servants permitted them to tell him respectfully but forcefully what they believed to be the truth. The letters of the Controller of the Civil List, covering a period of thirty years and touching upon a multitude of political questions as well as those of a more private nature concerning the prerogatives of the Crown, are a credit alike to the functionary who wrote and to the master who received them. Thanks to these two assistants, the King was never left in ignorance of anything he ought to know; their tact enabled the Crown to develop its influence without being accused of complicity with any faction.

[17] Cf. Hauleville in the "Revue générale," 1890, and E. Banning in "Indépendance belge," Dec. 31, 1887.

National in his habitual associates, Léopold wished to be national in his mode of life. He acquired the estate of Ardenne, in one of the most beautiful parts of the country, and it soon became his favorite residence. He bought the estate of Postel, in Campine. Each year he spent some weeks at Ostend, and made short stays at the camp of Beverloo, in Limburg. His union with the country, however, intimate as it was, long remained on his part an act of cold reason, for he disliked the climate of Belgium and his heart always remained true to his beloved Claremont.

Nevertheless, there was no affectation in his attitude. When, speaking to the Belgians, he evoked the great memories of their history, which he knew and which he willingly extolled, he did not forget that he was a naturalized citizen, and he took care never to force the note. His three children he made Belgians "in heart and soul," to use the expression of Léopold II. He studied Belgium minutely, visited every part of it, and learned it by heart. After the crisis of 1848 he began to love it, having fully appreciated by this time its sound wisdom and its unshakable loyalty. In his considered desire to please, he did not hesitate, at need, to regard the little whims of his subjects; the former general of the Czar sometimes wore the uniform of the civic guard; he took care to moderate his habitual English etiquette for the benefit of his informal and good-hearted people of Brussels.

He was passionately concerned for the material interests of his industrious country—its commerce, its ports, and above all its railroads, the importance of which he at once understood. "My Belgians are clearly materialists," he wrote to Metternich, "and diminished incomes are a

real torture to them." He worked for them with a fury which knew no repose, espousing their quarrels, making their honor his own. The desire to be recognized by Europe, to become a legitimate sovereign on a level with the rest, never led him to renounce a single national demand. His pertinacity sometimes astonished and irritated Louis-Philippe.

Léopold understood reigning and governing. He was an assiduous man who wished to see and understand everything. Every Sunday he presided over the Council of Ministers. He directed almost the smallest details of foreign relations.

On the mission of the Crown he had all the ideas Stockmar has set forth at length in his "Souvenirs." He thought the sovereign should participate in the deliberations of his ministers and guide their actions; but he knew that, as he had a right to their deference and respect, he must be strictly loyal to his only responsible advisers. It was because he understood the importance of this essential principle that he had his confidential agent intervene to put an end to the compromising political relations of Victoria with Lord Melbourne after the accession of Peel. "The business of the highest in a State," he wrote to Victoria on February 3, 1837, "is certainly, in my opinion, to act with great impartiality and a spirit of justice for the good of all, and not of this or that party."

But having set up this ideal, Léopold considered that the sovereign ought to defend his prerogatives with vigilance, in the interest of the people themselves. He wrote to Victoria on January 16, 1838:

Monarchy, to be carried on, requires certain elements, and the occupation of the Sovereign must be constantly to *preserve these*

elements, or should they have been too much weakened by untoward circumstances, to contrive by every means to *strengthen them again.* You are too clever not to know that it is *not* the being *called* Queen or King which can be of the *least consequence,* when to the title there is not also annexed the power indispensable for the exercise of those functions. All trades must be learned, and nowadays the trade of a *constitutional Sovereign, to do it well, is a very difficult one.*

He had, indeed, meditated on the theory and practice of the "trade," with a mind open to the ideas of his time. In the first place, he believed in a scrupulous observance of the Constitution. "I join you," he wrote Victoria on November 18, 1836, "a small copy of our very liberal Constitution, hitherto conscientiously executed—no easy matter." And, toward the end of his reign, in the course of conversations in which he seems to have been summing up his life experience for his daughter Charlotte, on the eve of her departure for Mexico, he emphasized the fact that, although much too detailed, the Belgian Constitution had been respected "with a scrupulous fidelity, not only as a whole but also to the very letter. Never has the least article been transgressed, and, however defective it may be, it has none the less been the basis of public confidence and security." [18]

Léopold was a temporizer; a disposition to postpone decisions was perhaps the dominant trait of his character. It was not without reason that they called him in England *Monsieur tout doucement.* He repeatedly recommended circumspection to Victoria. "In high positions," he wrote her on June 15, 1837, "it is excessively difficult to *retrace* a false move to get out of a mistake; and there exists

[18] Buffin, "La tragédie mexicaine," p. 71.

very rarely, except in time of war and civil feuds, a necessity for an *immediate* decision." The sovereign ought, then, to protect himself against too lively impatience, and at need become inaccessible. The palace at Laeken had in this respect practical advantages. He again wrote to Queen Victoria on June 27, 1837, to the same effect:

> Whenever a question is of some importance, it should not be decided on the day it is submitted to you. Whenever it is not an urgent one, I make it a rule not to let any question be forced upon my *immediate* decision; it is really not doing oneself justice *de décider des questions sur le pouce*. And even when in my mind I am disposed to accede, still I always keep the papers with me some little time before I return them.

And in fact there began at once a correspondence between the secretary of the King and the ministers in which van Praet interpreted Léopold's scruples with regard to signing this or that appointment or administrative decision. The sovereign discussed the measure, demanded explanations, and cited precedents. If it was a political measure, he examined it to see if it were included in the program agreed upon with the Crown at the time of the formation of the cabinet. Where the decision of a technical point was involved, he insisted on precise reasons for it. Often decrees were not returned from the palace, and the correspondence of Rogier abounds in bitter-sweet protests which prove that up to the end of Léopold's reign the royal signature had not become a mere formality.

Circumspection was above all necessary in the beginning. The King wrote to his niece just before her accession to the throne:

The policy of a new Sovereign must therefore be to act in such a manner as to hurt as little as possible the *amour-propre* of people, to let circumstances and the force of things bring about the disappointments which no human power could prevent coming sooner or later.[19]

Among the royal prerogatives, the right of dissolving the Chambers appeared to him to be of essential importance, and we shall see farther on how he struggled to retain this decisive weapon and to prevent its falling into the hands of the parties. Here prudence was doubly necessary. "One knows what one has," he often repeated, "but one does not know what he will have." In the time of a ministerial crisis the King made less haste than ever. If the parties caused him too many embarrassments, he did not hesitate to leave them in the lurch and set out for Windsor or for Paris, to give passions time to cool. Then he returned, saw the Parliamentary leaders, and made them exchange notes with van Praet. It was a duty "very painful," *"awful"* even, he said to Victoria,[20] but he discharged it with scrupulous care, great firmness, and unparalleled fairness.

Léopold was persuaded that the parliamentary system demanded continual vigilance on the part of those who practised it. "Here, thank God, we are getting along well," he wrote to Thiers on January 28, 1850, "and although we are a little country, we deserve to be something of an example, for we make use of institutions which in most countries are in a state of great confusion." His master idea was that government should rest on a just balance of the powers. The Crown, certainly, should

[19] June 15, 1837.
[20] May 14, 1841–June 28, 1844.

remain in the limited sphere assigned to it, but, on the other hand, neither the ministers nor Parliament should become all-powerful. In a letter to Thiers written on February 27, 1853, at the time of the formation of the Brouckere cabinet, Léopold said:

> These little parliamentary tactics will appear very trifling to you in the midst of great events, but, as the constitutional system is not yet definitely established, it is necessary to take note of such experiences; and the conclusion that I draw from them, for us at least, is that an extra-parliamentary cabinet is more in the true constitutional spirit than a majority administering and voting at the same time, thus in reality depriving the executive of all power, contrary to the true constitutional spirit which demands that the assembly only control and not absorb all the branches of power.[21]

The King, we may be sure, was thinking of the decline of the royal power in England since George III, for he was convinced that the princes of the house of Hanover had imprudently permitted the necessary equilibrium of the powers to be destroyed. In Belgium he struggled constantly and successfully against playing a rôle like that of the English King.

The constitutional régime, complex in organization, delicate in adjustment, appeared to Léopold I difficult to maintain in its purity. It is, as Guizot said, a régime of contradictions, resistances, and continuous compromises forced by political liberty upon the executive. It requires, as the King said to Thiers, with whom he loved to chat about the "tricks of the trade," an enormous "squandering of time." What effort is necessary to make the people understand their true interests! What pains to

[21] Lansac de Laborie, *op cit.*, p. 318.

train, and then to keep ministers! He said in 1849 to Count Appony: "The best, the most devoted, those whom one would like the most to keep, are always those the most exposed to the ill-will and the attacks of the opposition; in the end, one is obliged to get rid of them, for the whole Chamber declares itself against them. These men, however wise, however moderate so long as they are with me, once out of the ministry, throw themselves immediately into the opposition, and the poor King, who has done only what the majority of the Chamber demanded of him, no longer finds any support there because it is interested in ministers only to drive them from their places." [22]

To accomplish his task despite so many obstacles, a sovereign must evidence many qualities, and Léopold, like an attentive pedagogue, enumerates them to his niece: courage, honesty, and energy. But to these lofty virtues the King adds another, discretion: "Humble as it seems, it has often brought about successes in which talent failed and genius did not succeed. Discretion in the great affairs of the world does wonders, and safety depends frequently and is chiefly derived from it." [23]

Thus he insists, twice, that Victoria should not permit any one, not even her Prime Minister, to speak to her of personal affairs without being invited to do so. "You have no idea of the importance of this for your peace and comfort and safety. I always act on this principle, and I can say with great success."

English life had given Léopold I a firm belief in the influence of the press. It was not that he admired unre-

[22] A. De Ridder, in "L'Éventail," May, 1925.
[23] Léopold I to Victoria, July 24, 1837.

strained license in spreading abroad, through the newspapers, false information and subversive opinions. He wished for the press only the liberty to do good. But, taking things as they were, he sought for Belgium the support of the foreign papers. He particularly recommended Van de Weyer to win if possible the aid of the "Times." When necessary he addressed individuals in England capable of influencing papers still ill-disposed toward his country. He had articles on Belgium secretly written by Professor Arendt for the German papers, which ordinarily drew their inspiration from Orangist sources. Even in Belgium, where there were no important newspapers, the King understood at once the necessity for establishing and maintaining an organ capable of directing public opinion along reasonable lines. Thanks to his secret support, the "Mémorial" was founded, and the "Indépendant" bought by J. B. Nothomb and Count Félix de Merode. The annual deficit of the latter sheet, amounting to about forty thousand francs, was for a long time paid out of the civil list.[24]

The great success of Léopold I lay in his having made the best of the liberal institutions which had the support of public opinion. As he played on the régime like a virtuoso, he remains even now the model constitutional monarch. But it must be recognized that his success was not due solely to his personal qualities, which would have sufficed in any case to put him in a conspicuous place. He had the good fortune to reign at a period in which the ministers, very much engrossed with the theory of parliamentary government, made it a point of honor to pro-

[24] Cf. "L'Éventail," Oct. 2, 1927.

tect the Crown from direct responsibility, with a conscience and a discretion beyond praise. The numerous and sometimes very lively conflicts between the King and his counselors, from 1831 to 1865, were scarcely suspected by contemporaries. Only in his memoirs—published after his death—did M. Lebeau reveal the real cause of his resignation in 1833. De Theux, as we shall see farther on, pushed even to heroism his acceptance of responsibility for the famous words inserted in the speech from the throne in 1839, for which abuse was heaped upon him.

Well served by circumstances, admirably fitted for his task, Léopold I embodied a new type of kingship—a national kingship, active, unhampered by the past, a kingship friendly to liberty, independent of parties and factions, and solely devoted to the public welfare. By his services he won the affection and respect of a critical nation, and the frank approbation of men of every political faith. On this account Léopold deserves a special place in the study of comparative institutions. The history of his reign, and the analysis of his ideas and methods make an interesting contribution to the science of government. With the lapse of time, "the Belgian experiment" which delighted Baron Stockmar has acquired a considerable educational value.

Chapter IX

STRENGTHENING THE DYNASTY

STRENGTHENING the dynasty was the great task of the first King of the Belgians; he worked at it unremittingly, with a singular understanding of the psychology of the nation and the rôle of monarchy in the contemporary world. Léopold I found in the wife that political expediency had given him a co-worker who for eighteen years assisted him with a success attested by the unanimous regret at her premature death.

Louise-Marie of Orléans was an appealing figure. In August, 1832, at the age of twenty, she arrived in Brussels amid the enthusiasm of a nation eager for a queen. The marriage which had just taken place at the Château of Compiègne had been negotiated as a diplomatic affair of prime importance. Toward her husband, a widower of forty, she then felt, as she confessed later, "absolute indifference." She had given him her hand only in obedience to her duty as a French princess, a faithful instrument of paternal policy. It had been a terrible ordeal to leave her family, her attendants, and her native land, but in Belgium she very quickly found in the activities of her high position ample compensation for her sacrifice.

The King had at once appreciated the qualities of his young wife—her charm, the seriousness of her character, her unselfishness, her open mind. On August 31, 1832,

in a letter to Victoria, he drew a portrait of her which was altogether pleasing. He described her to his niece as having "hair very fair, light blue eyes, of a very gentle, intelligent, and kind expression. A Bourbon nose and small mouth." She had a white-and-rose complexion and an air of great timidity which concealed a gay and playful spirit. A writer who has gone through her private correspondence tells us that she had a sweet and sensitive soul and the strong and cultivated mind of a well-read woman. "In her father's salon she had taken delight in the most serious conversations and interested herself in social and political questions of the highest character, but always effaced herself with infinite discretion, without any desire to shine." [1] Her inner life was nourished on a profound piety which shone in all her acts as in all her thoughts.

Léopold quickly won her. After a month of marriage she wrote to a childhood friend:

> King Léopold makes me very happy. I am perfectly convinced that in marrying I could not have found a husband who would suit me better, who would be more tender, more moral, or more in harmony with me in his ideas and his sentiments. His kindness touches me profoundly.[2]

Two weeks later she wrote:

> As for the King, you know him. All I can tell you is that he makes me perfectly happy, that he is so good to me that it touches me deeply, that I esteem him profoundly, and that I have found in him the substantial and engaging qualities which could alone satisfy my heart.[3]

[1] Comtesse de Reinach-Foussemagne, "Charlotte de Belgique," p. 8.
[2] Duc de la Force, "Curiosités historiques," p. 244.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 246.

Soon the letters of Louise-Marie spoke with more freedom of the "well-beloved King." She had fallen truly in love with him, and had become his confidante. It was an attachment which ended only with her death. Unfortunately the Queen's health was delicate and required constant watchfulness.

Léopold I was singularly fascinating in the exercise of his profession of King. He had remained a very handsome man, elegant in figure and manner. His intellectual capacity was remarkable. An astonishing memory, a broad education, and a polished culture classed him at once among the leading few. He had a rare gift for languages, and he was heard one day, at a diplomatic reception in Paris, to speak successively French, English, Italian, Swedish, German, Greek, Russian, and Spanish.[4] He read much: memoirs in order to deepen that knowledge of government which was the principal object of his thoughts (he recommended to Victoria the "Memoirs of Sully"), and novels which fed his imagination and took him outside the world of reality. An artist, a passionate lover of music, interested in botany, an enthusiastic admirer of nature, very sensitive to feminine charm, he had a rich nature which ambition had in no wise impoverished.

His private life was simple; work occupied a large part of it. "Our life at Laeken," wrote the Queen, "is very sweet, very quiet, very calm. The King, his dog, and I live alone in the palace." [5] Léopold began his day early and devoted the morning to affairs of state. "Some chairs with light coverings, white curtains, little high tables

[4] Discailles, "Un diplomate belge à Paris." Fermin Rogier to Count de Briey, Apr. 8, 1842.

[5] Duc de la Force, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

where he wrote standing," said M. Juste, "such were the furnishings of the apartments he occupied, whether at Brussels, Laeken, Ardenne, or the Villa Julia on Lake Como." Sir John Bowring, who knew him well, tells us:

> There was no constraint or coldness in his manner. Not only did he receive with pleasure and cordiality those whom motives of private or public nature called to him, but there was also in his habitual demeanor a courtesy and a lovableness which charmed his guests and put them immediately at ease. He spoke with gravity, thoughtfulness, and a vigorous frankness which was exceedingly pleasing. French and English on his lips took a light touch of German in accent and sentence form, but his conversation was correct and grammatical.[6]

From the time of his arrival in Belgium the King had interested himself in building the monarchy into the life of the nation. The Queen helped him to enlarge his sphere of activity by making the court the center of society. The royal residence had been well equipped, according to the advice of Stockmar, who saw everything from the angle of political utility. Léopold had brought over from England magnificent silver plate and court traditions of majestic display without fastidious formality. Soon dinners, concerts, and balls were frequent at the palace, and a social life, polished and adroit, controlled by the King and the Queen, unsettled and dissipated the Orangism of the aristocracy and industrial middle class. The great families of the opposition party abandoned their sullen attitude. In 1838 the Prince de Ligne, the most prominent member of the nobility, fulfilled the mission of Ambassador Extraordinary from the

[6] Cf. "Revue générale," 1877, p. 299.

King at the coronation of the young Queen of England, and at the time of his return proudly refused to lower to the Dutch forts of the Scheldt the Belgian standard, which floated at the masthead of his ship.

The King and Queen traveled through the country; they were seen and acclaimed in all the provinces. The King visited thus the two Flanders, and in the Liége country made the circuit sadly interrupted in 1831.

> The different localities vied jealously with one another to prepare for him receptions worthy of the Sovereign of Belgium, and he left everywhere lasting impressions of his personality. He attracted his adversaries by the grace of his language, and had no trouble in winning the esteem and attachment of a great number of Orangists. He visited industrial establishments, surprising practical men with the extent of his knowledge. He conversed with the workmen and questioned them with kindness concerning their work and their needs. He lavished wholesome advice, at the same time distributing honorary awards to the zealous and capable manufacturers and truly royal marks of his munificence to the workers and to all the needy. Everywhere he gave proof that as an artist he could appreciate the excellent products of Belgium.[7]

At the capital of each province the King stopped with the governor, and in other places at the homes of notables. He invited to his table politicians, society people, and business men. To the last he paid special attentions, for he intended particularly to nationalize high finance, on which William I had adroitly laid his hand, and to effect the necessary reconciliation he did not hesitate to brave the criticism of the ultras, and even to risk a future ministerial crisis. At his departure, those who had shown him hospitality were delighted to receive a

[7] Poplimont, "La Belgique depuis 1830," pp. 502, 503.

piece of jewelry, a porcelain service, or a costly snuff-box. Naturally tactful, Léopold I won respect without offending revolutionary susceptibilities. He did not hurry matters. Although there was no throne room in his palace, although he wore no crown at the opening of the Chambers, he nevertheless introduced the forms of monarchy in so far as they were really useful. After 1833 one could smile at the fiery demagogue who regretted he could no longer believe that "the royalty of Belgium, like that of France, was characterized by the round hat and the umbrella under the arm."

But the court did not encumber itself with useless show. At the end of his life Léopold I recommended to his daughter Charlotte, whose husband was bound by the Austrian traditions, to free herself in Mexico from courtiers "who cost dear and are of no service." He himself had around him only active co-workers, directly associated with him in his duties as King. The office of Grand Marshal, entrusted in 1831 to the Count d'Arschot, was the instrument of a carefully drawn plan for connecting the dynasty with all the activities of social life.

The prestige of power was enhanced by the well-appointed palace, the shining carriages, the splendor of the receptions, and the excellence of the table. The service of the palace was regulated by principles which the King wished to see applied to all the branches of the administration. Although inclined to parsimony, Léopold I spent in 1836 more than two million and a half francs to sustain his rank. The *protocole,* however, was always for him a servant, and never a master. In 1840 the Count d'Arschot wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with respect to a matter of precedence:

The King has never liked to take a stand on that subject. After a revolution it is not easy to assign to each one the place that he should occupy, and his Majesty has perhaps wished to avoid adding offended vanity to the difficulties with which he sees himself surrounded.

Toward Orangists, even those of proved complicity in the events of 1831, the court was invariably forgiving. The King kept himself informed, however, relying little on the government police, which commanded neither the personnel nor the necessary funds to do good work. Until about 1845, there were vague plots in Brussels, and little subversive meetings in a fashionable restaurant, concerning which he obtained information, but these incidents never turned him from his personal policy of reconciliation. At the same time, Léopold I could, whenever it was necessary, show himself to be a king of the barricades. The story goes that he disliked the liberty tree, planted as a symbol of insurrection in the middle of the paved hillock before his royal dwelling. He endured the sight of it for a long time, but had it watered at night with destructive solutions until it died a natural death. The anecdote is amusing and characteristic of his turn of mind.

Léopold had the qualifications for success in Belgium. An impartial observer, H. L. Legaré, United States minister, giving his Government, on October 7, 1832, an account of a reception where the King had spoken at length of commercial relations to be established between Belgium and the New World, noted: "I am so much struck with the admirable sense and temper which are displayed in his whole conduct and conversation that I am tempted to repeat what I have already had occasion

to remark, that it is impossible the Belgians should have made a happier or a wiser choice." [8]

The strengthening of the monarchy was carried on according to a plan clearly defined in the mind of the King. He set forth his method one day in a letter to General Goblet, whom he had just sent to Lisbon to advise his nephew, now the husband of Queen Dona Maria: "It is toward administration of internal affairs and toward the financial interests of the country that the attention of royalty must turn." He went on to point out that practical considerations counsel moderation, and said:

> Lay aside for the moment every idea of counter-revolution, and persuade yourself that the action of time, although slow, is powerful. I have just made a trip to Ghent and have found there a noticeable improvement in opinion. If I had tried two or three years ago to bring about what exists to-day, I should probably have failed. I think I can be sure now that there will be in Ghent no retrograde movement, and that progress there is real and certain. It is the history of all political revolutions; they are calmed only by patience and moderation.

And speaking again of royal policy, the King of the Belgians said to his ambassador:

> The court has lived till now too far away from the Portuguese nation. Your influence should help to put an end to this state of things. It is desirable not only that the household of the King and Queen be set up and organized, but also that there be formed as soon as possible, around the throne, a Portuguese society which may establish a point of contact between the court and the nation. I am writing my nephew to this effect, and I advise you to remind

[8] Archives of the Department of State, Washington.

him of this matter, which I consider important and up to the present much neglected.[9]

July 24, 1833, the Queen gave birth to a son, a fine child. His birth was hailed with joy as the promise of a stable and prosperous future for the young monarchy. The little prince was baptized in the Catholic faith with great pomp at Sainte-Gudule by the Archbishop of Malines, in the presence of Queen Marie-Amélie, the Prince and Princess of Orléans, and all the constituted authorities.

Unfortunately the heir to the crown, given over to the conflicting ministrations of nurses of different nationalities, fell ill and died less than a year later, on May 16, 1834. The King was deeply despondent. The sad event recalled the death of his first-born, the child of Princess Charlotte, and seemed to forbid realization of any lasting accomplishment. His political correspondence was so neglected that he omitted to answer an important letter from the King of Prussia relative to the rejection of General Goblet as Minister to Berlin. After the burial of the child in the vault of the Dukes of Brabant, the King remained inaccessible for some time.

The Government, having learned that the Queen was not with child, suggested that the King, in accordance with the Constitution, designate his contingent successor among his Coburg nephews. Léopold acquiesced, but desired that Parliament initiate the measure. Lord Palmerston, being consulted, approved of the project, but Paris declared absolute opposition. Talleyrand received an order to combat every combination which would bring a

[9] Juste, "Le général Goblet," p. 101. The King's letter of Oct. 2, 1837.

German prince nearer the Belgian throne. Mme. Adélaïde flew into a passion and Louis-Philippe, replying to a letter of his son-in-law, denounced a suggestion which he declared "singular," in view of the independence and neutrality of the country.

> I say singular, my dear brother, because, truly, I cannot conceive why, at your age, with a wife like yours, the bitterness of the loss which we have just suffered leads you to the conclusion that it is urgent to provide for the chances of your succession and to tie Belgium up with a series of agnates like those of Luxemburg.[10]

Matters rested there, but the incident shows what complications might have arisen if evil chance had again brought up the dynastic problem. These fears, luckily, were unnecessary. On April 9, 1835, was born a second prince, who was to become King Léopold II; then, in 1837, Prince Philippe, Count of Flanders, the father of King Albert; and, in 1839, the Princess Charlotte. The last-named was at first coldly received by the sovereign, desirous before all of shielding the Crown from the blows of fate; but ambition yielded quickly to tenderness and the little daughter became the favorite child of the palace.

In 1836 the importance of the King of the Belgians was notably increased by the accession of Princess Victoria to the throne of England. Léopold had a deep affection for this charming child, his niece and almost his adopted daughter. After the sudden death of the English Princess Charlotte, little Victoria, daughter of the Duke of Kent and Marie-Louise-Victoire of Coburg, had been the delight and joy of his life and the support of his reviving

[10] Cf. Talleyrand, "Mémoires," Vol. V, pp. 405 *et seq.*

ambitions. The extreme youth of Victoria, unexpectedly the heiress of William IV, imposed on the uncle the duties of intimate counselor and guide.

Léopold's acceptance of the Belgian throne had not interrupted their intimacy. They carried on a regular correspondence and its published portions illuminate the personalities of the two monarchs. The letters of Léopold, from 1832 to 1865, touch upon all subjects and reveal an abandon, a spontaneity, and a richness of sentiment not found in any of his other writings. Victoria always remained for the King the living link attaching him to England and his beloved first wife. Although in politics the Queen lightly broke away from the influence of her uncle, the woman always remained faithful to him, and in the tragic hours of her life, upon the death of the Prince Consort, she sought consolation and support from Léopold alone.

The King of the Belgians, one feels, was not only the political adviser, he was also a sympathetic and lovable man. He had surrounded the childhood of Victoria with watchful care. He helped her to prepare herself for her rôle as sovereign and always aided her with his wise counsels. It was he who negotiated her marriage, devoting to the arrangement of that exceptionally happy union the same minute care he gave to the working out of all his plans. Careful to profit by happy circumstances in which affection and interest were in perfect accord, he frankly rejoiced over the success of his designs.

The Belgian royal family grew up in the midst of the deferential affection of the nation. The Queen with her long blond curls, the Duke of Brabant, slender in his grenadier's uniform, the Count of Flanders, fat and

chubby in the smart dress of the guards, and the Princess Charlotte, smiling under her large ribboned hat, became familiar figures, and their portraits, popularized by engravings, took them into innumerable homes.

The health of Louise-Marie, unfortunately, rapidly declined. She was subject to long fainting spells. She was deeply wounded by the successive misfortunes which unexpectedly befell the House of Orléans—the death of her brother the Prince Royal, the death of her sister Marie, then, in 1848, the fall of the dynasty and death of Louis-Philippe himself. Bruised, too, with grief of an even more intimate kind, she could not resist the shock to her frail constitution caused by a railroad accident. Her love for the King had survived cruel disillusionment. "To be your friend, your only friend, what can I desire more in the world?" she wrote to him on February 20, 1849. "All the happiness I have I owe to you." And with exquisite humility she spoke of her limitless "adoration and gratitude." During the summer of 1850 her condition caused the most serious anxiety. Removed to Ostend, she died there on October 10. One reads in a newspaper of the time:

> Calm, sweet, resigned, all her feelings were given expression without effort, with the most touching and the most admirable resignation. She thought much about the fate of her children, especially that of the Princess Charlotte, the youngest and best beloved. . . . She regretted her suffering because it pained her dear ones. The King was heard to say, sobbing, "Her death is as holy as her life."[11]

The death of the Queen was the occasion of independent Belgium's first national mourning. The entire coun-

[11] Comtesse de Reinach-Foussemagne, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

try shared in extraordinary manifestations of loyalty and regret. The return of the body by railroad from Ostend to Laeken via Bruges, Gard, Termonde, and Malines, was like a triumphal procession. Said Father Dechamps in the eloquent funeral oration which he pronounced at Sainte-Gudule:

"It was the will of God that she should die at the extremity of the realm, so that, borne across our provinces as on the arms of the people to the tomb she had chosen, she might imprint on the hearts of all the mark of her sainted life and death."

Léopold I, haunted by wrongs to the poor Queen which had incurred for him some public disapproval, was as one broken with grief, and on the day of the funeral solemnities he appeared altogether overcome by age and the trials of life. He always kept the Queen in grateful memory. "The angelic Louise," he wrote to Victoria in 1854, "the best and most noble of hearts." "Rarely," said he to Thiers, on October 19, 1850, in the first outburst of his grief, "rarely has there existed a more perfect union, for we had relations of unlimited confidence, a harmony of opinions and ideas not often found." [12] To the Archduke John he wrote that he had lost "an infinitely devoted friend," a confidante of his thoughts and of his feelings, who had anxieties only for him and lived only for him.[13]

The figure of Queen Louise-Marie, tender and sorrowful, gracious and kindly, is historically significant, because her life and her death united all Belgium in sympathy with the royal family.

[12] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 310.
[13] Corti, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

Chapter X

DISMEMBERMENT OF BELGIUM

To the Lebeau-Rogier ministry had succeeded in August, 1835, a cabinet inclined toward the Right, in which de Muelenaere once more held the portfolio of Foreign Affairs and de Theux that of the Interior. De Muelenaere was not a statesman of the first rank. In a kindly biographical study, Juste says of him:

> He was a skilful and wise tactician, reserved and silent, liking neither luxury nor the appearance of power, very simple in his habits and tastes, noted for an economy which recalled the Dutch frugality of the early days of the republic. Furthermore, he preferred to the government of the State the administration of his dear Flanders. It was his world and he was content with a horizon which stretched only from Ostend to Ghent. Flanders he loved with a jealous, exclusive passion. It was of him one of his former colleagues said, "For him, even God was Flemish."[1]

In short, he was a very characteristic representative of the great middle class of the period.

The Chevalier de Theux, who became premier in 1837 with the portfolios of both Foreign Affairs and the Interior, in other words the greater part of the Government, was a man of quite another stripe. Firm and shrewd, endowed with extraordinary capacity for work and a coolness equal to every emergency, he had become

[1] Juste, "Le comte de Muelenaere," p. 58.

the uncontested leader of the Catholics. His first experience with governmental responsibilities had completed his education. But his lack of qualities necessary to lead the public opinion of the nation was the source of grave difficulties.

Belgium was satisfied with the arrangements of 1833. She enjoyed the advantages of the *status quo*. Although the Dutch continued to hold the fort of Liefkenshoeck, on the Scheldt, the Belgians enjoyed entire freedom of navigation on the river. They had complete possession of Limburg except Maestricht and of Luxemburg except the fortress of that name, which were occupied by Dutch and German troops respectively. The portions of these provinces destined by the Treaty of the XXIV Articles to be transferred to Holland continued to send their deputies to Brussels and took full part in the national life. The only difference between these provinces and the rest of the kingdom was that in them the Government did not actually recruit soldiers. The King, too, refrained from going there on any of his very frequent official journeys. The more the provisional situation was prolonged, the higher rose the hope of a favorable definite arrangement.

Holland had done nothing to relieve the tension and King William had even refused to receive from the Belgian court the restitution of *objets d'art,* his personal property, left in the national palaces. But there was no longer immediate expectation of trouble. Until 1835 an army of observation of three divisions camped permanently on the Demer and on the Nethe. The camp of Beverloo was then laid out, to cover the frontier. The number of men under arms was reduced from 80,000 in

1833 to about 45,000. The annual contingent remained fixed at 12,000 men, and the mobilized strength at 110,000, with a budget of 40,000,000 to 49,000,000 francs.

The King was the first to recognize that these armaments constituted an excessive expense for the country, but he employed all his vigilance to maintain them, for the surprise of 1831 was always present in his memory. On the other hand, he no longer feared the results of a war with Holland. The general staff, still directed by a French officer, General Baron Hurel, definitely looked forward, in case of war, to offensive operations in the enemy's territory. In the interior the Orangists were becoming less and less dangerous, although they continued to cost their master at The Hague a pretty penny.

The diplomatic situation of Belgium, however, remained bad. The neutrality with which the London Conference had invested her, and her loyal acceptance of the obligations it involved, had not yet won her the least mark of good-will from Russia, Austria, and Prussia. By a convention of March 9, 1833, these powers had undertaken, on the contrary, to act unitedly on the Belgian question, agreeing to oppose any coercive measure against Holland and to insist on the guaranty of Dutch territory as the Treaty of the XXIV Articles defined it. General Goblet, appointed Minister to Berlin on the retirement of the ministry in 1834, was not received by the Prussian court. At Brussels the German diplomats always played the part of surly antagonists.

There were many disagreeable incidents. In 1836, for example, Prussia and Austria sought a quarrel with Belgium because the latter proposed to fortify the line of

the Demer. There ensued a long diplomatic struggle, extremely secret, in the course of which Prussia strove to impose on Belgium the humiliating and costly condition of leaving wide open the road to Brussels. The Government, energetically supported by Lord Palmerston, defended Belgium's right to provide as she saw fit for the defense of her territory. But, in order not to push her adversary too far, Belgium contented herself with completing the fortifications undertaken about Diest. It is an interesting coincidence that it was near these old-fashioned ramparts that the German cavalry was crushed in 1914. The continued malice of the three powers toward Belgium persisted throughout this period, and the personal relations of the King with the German courts were powerless to overcome it.

"Ah! if we had known you better in 1831," old Metternich was to exclaim ten years later, "we would have done much better by you, but we regarded you as an ungovernable people."

Lebeau later reproached the ministry of de Theux for not having tried to win the German powers to the Belgian cause. What we know to-day of their state of mind proves that any such attempt was foredoomed to failure. The realm of Belgium, in their eyes, was only a branch of the France of July, and they had not yet, despite all the signatures that had been exchanged, sincerely reconciled themselves to the Revolution.

Besides, even in England the Belgian question had not entirely ceased to be a party issue. The first task of Van de Weyer was to win to the Belgian cause the Tories opposed in principle to the policies of Palmerston. Léopold, attached as he was to several of the Whig leaders,

regarded this effort as specially important. He wrote to Van de Weyer on April 19, 1835:

> As a country our happy and independent existence is useful to England; we save her embarrassments and we offer her more and more advantages. It is, then, important for us that in addition to the Liberal party, which has taken this view, the Conservative party should cease to consider us a parcel of rebels. England must be our principal support. She neither could nor would devour us, and she has none of the stupid suspicions of Russia, Austria, and Prussia.[2]

Such was the situation when on March 14, 1838, the King of Holland suddenly renounced the course he had stubbornly followed since 1831, and gave notice of his adherence to the Treaty of the XXIV Articles.

The decision of the sovereign of the Netherlands was of considerable significance. He finally bowed before the accomplished fact of the Revolution and rendered possible, in a future more or less remote, the establishment of normal relations between two nations naturally intended to work together and to contribute to the maintenance of international equilibrium in the West; abandoning to their fate the last Orangists, he assured to the house of Saxe-Coburg the uncontested possession of the throne. As Louis-Philippe, who suffered so much from being treated as a usurper, said, it was for King Léopold "recognition by the elder branch." But putting into force the decisions of the London Conference meant the mutilation of territory, which the Belgians had hoped to put off indefinitely. It meant the application in cold blood, after eight years of delay, of a disastrous treaty imposed

[2] Juste, "Van de Weyer," Vol. II, p. 18.

on Belgium in the bitterness of defeat. For the rulers of Belgium the problem was formidable. Having lived under the threat of Dutch invasion since 1831, the country had not enjoyed security as a compensation for the sacrifices agreed to. In addition to the financial difficulties arising from the Revolution, Belgium had been obliged to devote to defense a sum of about 370,000,000 francs. This expense, enormous for the time, had been imposed upon her by the obstinacy of the King of Holland and by the refusal of Russia, Austria, and Prussia to let rigorous measures be taken against him. The text of the treaty of November 15, 1831, the execution of which William I now demanded, charged to Belgium the arrears of a heavy debt, the principal of which had been the subject of the most arbitrary valuation. From the financial point of view alone, simple acquiescence in the tardy acceptance of the treaty by the King of Holland was impossible, because the intervening delay had caused serious damage to one of the contracting parties.

And what of the territorial stipulations? The sacrifice of the half of Limburg and of Luxemburg, agreed to with despair in 1831, appeared still more grievous after eight years of independent life in common. To submit at once was to consent definitely to the mutilation of the country—an astutely cruel mutilation which reduced its historic boundaries and deprived it of a position of capital importance on the Meuse and the Moselle. The Government, which had with difficulty mastered the forces of the Revolution, was again threatened with the duty of opposing cold reasons of state to public sentiment, and the dynasty ran the risk of losing in the adventure the popularity it now enjoyed.

During a whole year the question whether to accept or reject the treaty, whether or not to run the risk of war, occupied the country. Belgium, to be sure, had signed and ratified the XXIV Articles; she had on many occasions demanded their execution. She was bound and juridically she could not free herself. But in all fairness, assuredly, Holland should have been penalized for her prolonged resistance to the arbitral judgment of Europe. Considerations of high policy, furthermore, should have led the powers to strengthen and not to weaken the young State, whose ability to survive had now been demonstrated. In the interest of general peace, and of European equilibrium, it was desirable to fortify, not to shatter, Belgian national sentiment, to strengthen the dynasty by giving it a diplomatic success, and to assure to Belgium the possession of the territories included in its natural boundaries.

But these considerations weighed little against the rancors which must be indulged at all cost. The powers paid no attention to the unanimous protests of the sacrificed populations. The Treaty of the XXIV Articles constituted a European agreement achieved with very great difficulty, and as such it remained, even in the eyes of Belgium's best friends, virtually unalterable in its essential provisions. The patriotism of the Belgians, the ardent zeal of their leaders, their desire to push their country on to its highest destinies struck in vain against the decree ridiculously pronounced, in the name of conservative principles, by Berlin and Vienna. The lassitude of England and France did the rest.

On March 19, 1838, news of the adherence of the King of Holland reached Brussels. On May 4 the Eng-

lish minister at Brussels, by order of his Government, informed de Theux that Belgium must abandon the hope of obtaining any modification whatever of the territorial clauses of the treaty. Shortly after, to the despair of the King, a note from Palmerston advised the powers that the British cabinet would refrain from supporting the claims of Belgium. On May 13, Count Lehon, Belgian representative in Paris, sent the King a long, urgent, and well-reasoned despatch, to inform him that there also the Belgian cause was lost. The attitude taken by England absolutely prohibited the Government of Louis-Philippe from reopening discussion of the boundaries. In vain Léopold tried to induce Queen Victoria to intervene.[3] On June 10 he received from his niece a mortifying refusal:

> You may be assured, my beloved Uncle, that both Lord Melbourne and Lord Palmerston are most anxious at all times for the prosperity and welfare of Belgium, and are consequently most desirous of seeing this difficult question brought to a conclusion which may be satisfactory to you. Allow me once more therefore, dearest Uncle, to beseech you to use your powerful influence over your subjects, and to strive to moderate their excited feelings on these matters. Your situation is a very difficult one, and nobody feels more for you than I do.

Belgium was, then, abandoned by its only friends, and it would doubtless have been wise not to conceal the fact. But in view of the disturbed state of public opinion the cabinet did not dare to acknowledge itself conquered so quickly. It preferred to hope that since Holland was in need of money, large territorial concessions might be obtained in return for liberality in the settlement of the debt. A veritable explosion of nationalism forced the Bel-

[3] See letter of Léopold to Victoria, June 2, 1838.

gian negotiators to attempt the impossible. During April and May an avalanche of petitions, especially from localities threatened with cession, had poured in upon the King and Parliament. The legislative chambers, the provincial councils voted addresses, the smallest communes of Limburg and of Luxemburg uttered protests which resounded through the country like cries of grief. "If gold is needed," said, for example, the delegates of the canton of Meersen, "dispose of our fortunes! If men are needed, our blood is ready to flow for the land! No cession! . . . We will remain Belgians, we will remain brothers until death!" In French or Flemish, the notables of all the villages on the right bank of the Meuse sent to Brussels ardent expressions of loyalty and consciousness of Belgian unity.

Léopold, desirous of endearing his dynasty to the nation, had no intention of being made to appear in Belgium as the mere executor of the wishes of the London Conference. He hesitated what to do in these delicate circumstances. To gain time, and to avoid being swept by tumultous manifestations into a course from which there would be no escape, he decided to hear outside the capital the addresses of the provincial councils. He took advantage of his stay at the camp at Beverloo to receive the delegates of Limburg, and of his visit to his Château of Ardenne to meet those of Luxemburg.

"One cannot deny," said he to the latter, "that the country has to contend with strong political passions beyond the Rhine; we must do nothing to irritate them. In the seven years I have been in Belgium I have proved how much interest I have in the inhabitants of Luxemburg. No one can doubt my desire to keep them all.

Unfortunately, the disasters of 1831 have fatally affected the progress of the negotiations. It is difficult to overcome, even long after they have happened, the results of great events."

The King then went abroad, to obtain exact knowledge of the situation. In Paris he learned definitely that France neither could nor would risk a war to support Belgium. He put no faith in the radical parties who criticized the prudence of Louis-Philippe. Military action which would bring upon Belgian soil the troops of the great powers might compromise the very existence of Belgian nationality. "Certain words," wrote van Praet from the Tuileries, "reëcho in France in a surprising fashion." And he recalled to de Theux that there was in Paris scarcely a statesman "who would not find that the temporary occupation of one or another Belgian fortress would be a thing too marvelously popular with the Chambers and the country, and of a nature to give much relief to any ministry whatever." [4]

The official negotiations were concerned, then, principally with the amount of the debt, but in August, Palmerston made a point of saying to Van de Weyer, in the frankest manner, that the Belgian Government could cherish no hope of bargaining, in view of the unalterably hostile disposition of the German Confederation.

In September, Léopold went to England, to visit Queen Victoria. Before his departure for Windsor he received the French minister at Brussels, who reported:

A noble sadness at this time shadowed the face of the King. His Majesty told me that if he made this trip, it would certainly not

[4] A. De Ridder, "Histoire diplomatique du traité de 1839," p. 106.

be as a humble petitioner; that he would doubtless defend the interests of his subjects, but by showing how much the peace of Europe and its strengthening were concerned in the tranquillity of Belgium and in not permitting too heavy sacrifices to be imposed upon her. Doubt as to the result weighed on his mind. The sentiment of the King on the question is the sentiment of the entire country and tends daily to grow stronger.[5]

Upon his arrival the royal ambassador saw that the diplomatic situation had not been misrepresented to him. "It is not at all satisfactory," he wrote to de Theux. The English ministry was influenced by Parliament and the holders of Dutch bonds, who wished no complications. It yielded to the pressure of Russia, Austria, and Prussia. Palmerston, friendly at bottom, was restrained by his colleagues, more attentive than he to public opinion. A French diplomat thought himself justified in saying that Léopold, on leaving his niece, had absolutely abandoned all hope of any modification of the territorial clauses of the treaty.

In reality the King had not yet completely closed his mind to the possibility of armed resistance. He had decided not to permit the King of Holland himself to carry out the decision of the powers, and on this point he remained firm. In 1831 he had very strongly resented the constant violation of the promises upon which he had accepted the crown, and his feelings had not changed since. In a letter which he addressed to Talleyrand, on June 5, 1832, he said:

As for me, you may be sure that I shall do my best for the maintenance of peace, and I have on this point faithfully carried

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

out my task; but let them get clearly in their heads the fact that I will not be overthrown without defending myself to the death and causing many others to fall with me. I have made up my mind to this, with the greatest coolness.[6]

Six years later the same thought was in his mind, and he again asked whether it were not better to risk the use of force than to incur the reproach of not having defended to the last the point of view of the patriots.

At the end of November, van Praet was sent to London to get direct information and to express the King's personal views to the English leaders. Léopold wrote Palmerston an urgent letter in which the Belgian cause, free of all sentimentality, was set forth in luminous fashion. He showed that the devotion to their nationality evidenced by the outbursts for which the Belgians were then blamed was something England ought to welcome, as the greatest obstacle to absorption of the country by France. He said:

To destroy Belgium would not be difficult for the great powers, but let me ask you what would happen afterward and what would be thought of the English cabinet which had subjected an innocent and prosperous country to such a fate. I have the right to ask these questions, for I am essentially bound to England, and that is the reason why I was the choice of Belgium. It is clear that if I had not considered that the existence of an independent Belgium was truly in the interests of Great Britain I could not have consented to govern her.[7]

The address from the throne on November 13, awaited with impatience by a feverish public, did not disclose

[6] Talleyrand, "Mémoires," Vol. IV, p. 467.
[7] A. De Ridder, "Une mission de J. van Praet" in the "Bulletin de la Commission royale d'Histoire," 1924, p. 167.

clearly the policy adopted by the Government. "Our disputes with Holland," it said, "are not yet settled. The rights and the interests of the country are the sole guides of my policy. They have been treated with the care which their importance demands." But these sibylline phrases were followed by another which proved to be charged with dynamite: "They will be defended with perseverance and courage."

These words, in the disturbed state of the public mind, had a repercussion which no one could have foreseen. The majority of the deputies, influenced by popular feeling, gave them at once a bellicose significance, and claimed to see in them an appeal to arms. De Theux, returning home from the session heartbroken over the enthusiasm, inexplicable to him, which had taken possession of Parliament, cried, "It is the most unhappy day of my life!" The position of the ministry was the more painful because the now historic words had been added to the speech by Léopold himself. For him they had only their literal meaning. But received with delight by those who dreamed of an energetic policy, and made on the instant the watchword of the nation, their echoes in Belgium and abroad ran the risk of committing the cabinet irrevocably to an intransigeant policy.

The addresses of the two Chambers, in spite of the efforts of the cabinet (efforts which the King thought too discreet), surpassed the speech from the throne. Those who doubted the possibility of resisting the verdict of Europe, kept silent in order not to hamper the desperate maneuver which they believed the Government had attempted. The King was very much vexed by this incident and reproached his ministers for accepting the address.

Léopold, noted for his caution, had for once been trapped; the jingoistic found in his language a sanction for the most dangerous game. M. de Theux, embarrassed by applause which he tried in vain to escape, understood that some wished to cut him off from every line of retreat. He assumed, as was his duty, full responsibility for the error committed, and later endured uncomplainingly the most unjust and abusive attacks without disclosing the King's part in the matter. It was only in 1921 that an examination of his papers showed how much credit he deserved for his silence.

The foreign diplomats on duty in Brussels were disturbed by the strength of the war spirit. Sir H. Seymour, the English minister, deplored in a despatch to Palmerston, dated November 30, the misinformation current in Belgium concerning the attitude of southern German States. He feared a disturbance in the army. He reported that Count Félix de Merode, member of the Council of Ministers, expressed himself "in the most violent manner." The count said:

> England might blockade the Scheldt, France might push weakness to the point of refusing us aid; it would be seen in a few months that British commerce would have suffered more than Belgian, and whatever the prudence of the French Government, it would be overwhelmed by the generous sentiments of the nation. In the end Belgium would be perhaps dismembered, but no one would be able to force her to pay.

The whole Catholic party was of this opinion, affirmed the diplomat, in spite of the efforts of the internuncio, Fornari, who, as the King wished, acted as a moderating influence on the bishops.[8] The contrary opin-

[8] Cf. Colenbrandner, *op. cit.*

ion did not dare to express itself publicly. But Seymour observed that although unanimity prevailed as long as it was a matter of oratory, it would not prevail if it were necessary to proceed to action. He recounts the following incident:

> I was chatting with M. de Theux in the King's salon when we were joined by Count Vilain XIV, who delivered himself of a most violent attack upon the policy of the Government. He declared that the end at this time pursued by the Government was without importance. The priests and the ministers have caused the opposite to be believed. After having commented with the greatest severity on the blindness of endangering the prosperous situation of the country for a simple matter of sentiment, he added in terms which I reproduce for their virulence: "Well, monsieur, if you succeed, no doubt your triumph will be a fine one; you will remain minister a long time; if, on the contrary, you fail, as everything leads to the belief that you must, we shall find ourselves in an abyss and the country will not have gibbets enough to hang you, you and your colleagues.[9]

The year ended feverishly. The newspapers resounded with violent polemics. Innumerable pamphlets added fuel to the flame. The inhabitants of the ceded areas moved heaven and earth to strengthen the party of resistance. Patriotic associations were formed to stimulate the lukewarm zeal of the ministers. Revolutionary talk again became the fashion. The rights of the people were opposed to the divine right of kings, and the generous efforts of Montalembert in Paris and of O'Connell in London roused throughout the country unfounded hopes. It would have been all very well if, as the crowd believed, it had been only a question of fighting it out with

[9] Colenbrandner, *ibid.* Despatch of Sir H. Seymour of Nov. 30, 1838.

Holland, but the quarrel was infinitely greater. The King, happily, kept the confidence of the nation, and even his hesitations increased his hold on public sentiment. On Sunday he was habitually seen in an open carriage, taking the air in the Allée Verte, the rendezvous of the fashionable people of the town, accompanied by the Queen and sometimes the little Duke of Brabant. Each week he presided over the council; he received the diplomats; he saw the military men. On New Year's day M. de Gerlache, speaking in the name of the Court of Cassation, could truthfully salute the monarchy as the best safeguard of the country in the crisis then imminent.

"Magistrates and citizens," said he, "to-day we join our voices to those of the great bodies of the State and of the people to thank your Majesty for all that you have done for the country. Formerly Belgium always succumbed for lack of national unity and of a native royalty. She has finally found this double source of strength. Belgian nationality has been strengthened by calling to the throne a Prince who must share our destiny. The country had no Belgian King to defend it when, by the Treaty of Westphalia, the Scheldt and all its avenues of commerce were closed to us. It had no Belgian King when, in the course of the seventeenth century, there were concluded with Holland and France five or six successive treaties each of which we paid for with some fragments of our provinces. The country had no Belgian King when it was forced to sacrifice the Ostend Trading Company to the commercial jealousy of its neighbors. It had no Belgian King when it went through that Brabançon Revolt [10] which began so well and ended so sadly. (There

[10] Oct., 1789-Dec., 1790.

was no lack then of patriotism and enthusiasm, but a lack of government.) The country had no King to support its cause before the tribunal of nations and of sovereigns when, in 1814, they reunited it as a pure accessory with a people which had violently separated itself from us, from its old faith and its Prince, two centuries and a half before. The country had no Belgian King when it was made in turn a Spanish, an Austrian, a French, and a Dutch province—when, in short, its princes or its masters exchanged it like a piece of second-hand furniture."

And the former president of the Congress, applying to the present the lessons of the past, added:

"It is the Belgian crown which has been the central point of cohesion and of preservation of the different provinces, of the different languages and the different interests which the Revolution of 1830 raised in revolt. It has put the seal on our independence, at last happily achieved. It has been the dawn of a new existence for us. If we dare to recall to-day these well-known facts, sire, it is because we embrace always with more love a blessing which we believe to be threatened, though by a foolish fear. For almost eight years, during which Belgium has possessed a Prince of her choice, her cause has been sustained by a wise and powerful defender whom the nation loves and reveres and whom the foreigner esteems because his character and his life offer every guaranty to Europe, and because he will take care to sacrifice none of the advantages which we won so late and which cost so dear."

In order to give to the public proof that nothing had been neglected for the defense of the national cause, two men of the Revolution were sent on special foreign mis-

sions, Count de Merode to Paris, M. de Gerlache to London, with instructions authorizing them to offer up to a hundred million francs for the preservation of the two threatened provinces. Their efforts were fruitless.

By the end of January nothing more was to be hoped for from negotiations. The attempts made by the King to introduce the notion of a re-purchase of certain territories had failed. The cabinet had to reach a decision. Until now the individual ministers had reserved the right to follow different lines of conduct. There was little harmony among them, and the War Department, directly subject to the palace, by speeding up preparations, hurrying promotions, and summoning a Polish insurgent, General Skrzynecki, had clearly given the impression that recourse to arms was imminent. However, at the council of January 31, which marked the split in the Government, the King took a position in favor of the acceptance of the terms of the Treaty of the XXIV Articles, as proposed by de Theux, Nothomb, and General Willmar. On February 5, Ernst and d'Huart left the ministry, followed on February 18 by Count de Merode, who consistently favored the system of passive resistance.

A French diplomat, who came in contact with the King at this troubled time, on February 11 voiced the impression that Léopold was still hesitating. He said of his Majesty:

> It seems to me that I see him divided between several opinions; his better judgment, which shows him the necessity of yielding, is struggling against his unwillingness to take issue with what at least has the appearance of a national movement, to impose on his ministers a painful decision, to dare the wrath of the Catholic party, to wound so many passionate but sincere convictions. Per-

haps also he regards with some complaisance those 80,000 men with whom he desires and hopes to fight "the Wurtemburgers."

The importance the circumstances gave to Belgium, "certainly in a position to bring about a great crisis in Europe," was not entirely without appeal to his Majesty, and he felt himself carried away by the prospect of taking revenge for the Louvain defeat of 1831. In short, the idea, repeated frequently in his conversation, that really he was "very independent," presented again in these circumstances, seemed to me to point to this: that if his position was rendered too hard he could leave it without difficulty, and, having such a fine opportunity to retreat, he could even afford to take some risks. His Majesty emphasized the discredit he would incur in the public mind by yielding without having attempted physical resistance, and the probability of success against the troops of the Confederation.[11]

The tragically complex situation was rendered still more delicate by a rupture of diplomatic relations with Prussia and Austria as a result of the employment of General Skrzynecki.

The resignation of a portion of the ministry led to the adjournment of the Chambers, but on February 19 they were convoked anew. De Theux introduced a bill authorizing the King to conclude the definitive treaty. Passed by committee, it came up March 9 for general debate.

It was the third time that the legislature had had to deal with treaty stipulations affecting the integrity of Belgian territory. The discussion the Congress had settled in 1831, under the influence of Lebeau, came up again to force the representatives of the country to sacrifice their own feelings for reasons of state. What was particularly cruel, in 1839, was that a nation in the full

[11] A. De Ridder, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

flower of youth was obliged to submit to the unfortunate consequences of a previous defeat, of which it was ashamed. The recent events had increased the peace party —in fact the opposition agreed on nothing—but the debate came near leaving the executive dishonored and disgraced. For five days the struggle continued, attaining a rare degree of pathos and violence. The three ministers who had remained in office—they belonged, all three, to the threatened provinces—had to submit to outrageous invectives from patriots maddened by grief. "Unhappy statesmen! Wicked ministers!" cried Dumortier. "You have been false to honor, for you have basely betrayed us!" exclaimed Liedts.

On March 4, Nothomb, Minister of Public Works, defended, in the finest speech of his career, the point of view of the Government. He showed that the powers were resolved to deprive Belgium of her triple position on the Scheldt, the Meuse, and the Moselle. Fundamentally, the powers feared France. Belgium had not the confidence of Europe. "When she has gained it, then only will she have a chance to obtain what she needs to fulfil her destiny in the world." He showed that everywhere Belgium was without support, and that the question was no longer *whether* the treaty would be executed, but *how* —administratively or by military force. Military force would sacrifice the whole country as well as the ceded territories.

Devaux, as usual, dealt in the loftiest of arguments. Foreseeing the day when a general war would bring the armies of the great powers face to face, he showed that Belgium ought above all to put her independence on a sound basis.

"To be willing to arrive at that decisive moment with a contested territory, an equivocal existence, a nationality unrecognized, with precarious boundaries, with the antipathy of all who should aid us, with the reputation of a people incapable of settling down, threatening to endanger its neighbors by the contagion of anarchy, isolated, without a strong alliance in Europe—that would be, gentlemen, to yield to the most inconceivable and the most fatal improvidence; it would be to assassinate our nationality in its cradle. . . .

"Gentlemen," he continued, "the Belgian nation needs at least ten years of consolidation, of calm, regular, and uncontested existence, in order to push its roots into the soil of Europe, and be able to await the storm with some confidence. For us it is everything to achieve such stability. If we succeed we shall have answered many unjust conjectures in the North; in the South we shall have singularly weakened ambitious claims."

This vigorous thinker, imbued with an understanding of government, blamed the ministers for having been too slow to tell the truth to the country. Public opinion at fever heat, the threat of riots, suspected conspiracies, drew from him this memorable warning:

"Let us no longer forget that the strength of the executive power has its uses. Let us no longer forget what may happen in a country in a few weeks when public authority is weakened. Let us no longer forget that the rôle of the executive is not to cherish errors and illusions, but to combat and destroy them; that its place is before and not behind; that its duty is not to let itself go in every direction in which it is pushed, but to march cou-

rageously ahead of opinion, to enlighten, and to guide in the way it knows to be the best."

Lebeau seconded his friend. He showed that Limburg and Luxemburg had been lost on the battle-field of Louvain. The opposition, he said, could indulge in poetry; the Government was obliged to stick to realities. The policy which made the existence of Belgium depend on the hazardous chances of a European war compromised even the future. It was a suicidal policy.

On the side of the opposition, it was Alexander Gendebien who spoke most eloquently. On March 16 the former member of the Provisional Government closed his public career with an admirable discourse, full of passion and fire. He felt the cause which he had defended for eight years, with incomparable tenacity, to be already lost. He knew that Europe, and Belgium itself at bottom, condemned the warlike policy he had continually extolled in the name of revolutionary principles, the ardor and—it must be said—the imprudence of which he embodied. He spoke with all his soul, showing that the unjust treaty was the fatal consequence of the policy of agreement with Europe, accusing the Government of duplicity, calling for the last time upon Belgium to resist, threatening foreign thrones with the revolutionary avalanche. He declared that he regretted the Revolution, since it had arrived at such a pass.

"We handed on to you that fine name intact," said he to the ministers. "What have you done with it? Unanimously supported by the Chambers and the country, you have not been able to invoke it; because of its origin you have disavowed it. You have dragged it in the mire of

courts and diplomacy! To-day it is stained, unrecognizable. To-morrow you will dishonor it!"

In a last effort, he thundered against Lebeau, against Nothomb, against Devaux, who had snatched the conduct of affairs from him in 1831. He breathed the suffering of disillusioned patriots, and we must reproduce his words in order to bring out the intensity of the feeling of which he was the interpreter:

"Condemn to ostracism our compatriots of Limburg and Luxemburg, since my voice is powerless to defend them, powerless to defend you against yourselves! But I protest and withdraw. If I cannot prevent you from condemning your compatriots, I can at least share their lot. Our punishment will be equal. The moment you pronounce your sentence I condemn myself to political ostracism. Yes! I shall be a Helot in my own country; yes, in this country where with the men of yesterday I risked everything to free it from the foreign yoke. Yes, I risked all. My life was nothing, but I compromised my entire family; I put the lives of my wife and my seven children in danger. Yes, I condemn myself to ostracism, and when some day my children come to ask of you a refuge and protection, your children will receive them as brothers and, grasping their hands, they will say, 'These are the children of him who from the first worked for our independence and who condemned himself to political death rather than consent to our dishonor.' "

These vibrant appeals were repeated by the deputies of Limburg and Luxemburg; they echoed in the street, where a great force of police assured the defense of the Government against insurrection. To add drama to these spirited debates, a deputy from Courtrai, M. Beckaert-

Baekeland, choked by emotion, fell dead in his place while saying that he would vote for the treaty in the hope of a better future which would reunite all Belgians. Finally, on March 18, the Chamber adopted the project of the Government by 58 votes to 42. Gendebien voted:

"No, three hundred and eighty thousand times 'no' in the name of the three hundred and eighty thousand Belgians whom you sacrifice to fear!"

Reason had won the day, but after what a struggle and what wounds! On March 26 the Senate ratified the decision of the Chamber by a vote of 31 to 14, but not until Count d'Ansembourg, deputy from Maestricht, who enjoyed at that moment enormous popularity, with sorrowful protestations had moved the assembly to tears.

Léopold had followed with anxiety the moral crisis which rent his kingdom. He had suffered from the indifference of England; Victoria herself had unceremoniously abandoned him. He was angry with those conservative Governments which let his throne be shaken the better to gratify their animosities. "Your Highness," he wrote to Metternich on March 3, "knows and judges the Belgians very well." And after this rhetorical precaution he added:

They are very peculiar, and, what is more, the preceding Governments, not excepting that of the Emperor Joseph, have rendered them so stubborn and distrustful that affairs here can be conducted only with the greatest frankness, loyalty, and patience. A serious proof of the solidity of the base on which the present Government rests is that this Government has succeeded, by the use of the pitiable means which the Constitution gives it, in resisting the attacks and the crises which would certainly have overthrown any former Government. I was completely freed from the anarchic rabble, and the monarchical principle had made the greatest prog-

ress, much greater than in France, when the decisions of the Conference, destitute as they were of tact and of consideration, awakened the most violent passions.[12]

Again, the King said:

My position is very hard and unenviable, and I am making new and painful sacrifices for the peace of Europe by accepting the decisions of the Powers and inducing my country to do so. It would be dangerous to the country not to accept, but it might be just as dangerous for the Powers, and a violent enforcement of them might have consequences which are not to be ignored.[13]

The King added that he was really very independent, and that he would not have any trouble in procuring for himself a position as agreeable as the throne of Belgium, "where truly the pains and torments increase in too considerable proportions."

Léopold was visibly sad and discouraged. He considered that the country not only had undergone a serious territorial amputation but had been injured in its faith in itself. As he wrote on April 19, 1839, to the Queen of England:

Physicians will tell you that often an operation, which might have been performed at one time, could not, without great danger for the patient, be undertaken some years later. We have not been listened to, and arrangements *are forced* on us, in themselves full of seeds of danger, when by consulting the *real interests* of Holland and Belgium, both countries might have been placed on a footing of *sincere peace* and good neighborhood. This country feels now humbled and *désenchanté* with its *soi-disant* political independence, as it pleased the Conference to settle it. They will take

[12] Archives of Foreign Affairs. Correspondence of Léopold I with Metternich.
[13] Cf. Corti, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

a dislike to a political State which *wounds their vanity,* and will, in consequence of this, *not wish it to continue.* Two things will happen, therefore, on the very first opportunity, either that this country will be involved in war to better a position it thinks *too humiliating,* or it will voluntarily throw up a nominal independence in which it is now hemmed in between France and Holland, which begins on the North Sea, and ends, of all the things in this world, on *the Moselle!*

I think old Pirson, who said in the Chamber that if the treaty was carried into execution I was likely to be the first and last King of the country, was not wrong. Whenever this will happen, it will be *very awkward* for England, and *deservedly so.*

The monarchy did not suffer from the crisis; the country understood that its leader had once more served it devotedly. But the diplomatic defeat of 1839, which confirmed the military defeat of 1831, exercised on the public mind a profound influence, hitherto not sufficiently noticed by historians. The nation, after many months of exaltation and delusion, retired within itself with a feeling of powerlessness. It had been made to see that it did not hold its destiny in its own hands; it resigned itself to its fate. The neutrality which at first it had not accepted without trembling became the formula of its discouragement. It took less and less interest in the outside world. The fine little army which had been refused permission to fight ceased to be its pride and hope. Its strength was reduced; its importance, even its usefulness was debated. Ministers and members of Parliament gave almost exclusive attention to internal affairs. Up to the time when the vigorous initiative of Léopold II forced her into the path of colonial imperialism, Belgium, remembering her early futility, suffered from the illness which the King had diagnosed.

However, the noble exaltation of 1839 expressed the vital instinct of the Belgians. Fifty years later, Emile Banning, who had deeply meditated on the fundamental principles of Belgian independence, said that it was the defeat of Belgium which permitted Germany to resume the march toward the Meuse which English ascendancy had stopped in 1815. He wrote:

> There is no political thinker in Europe who does not recognize to-day that the boundaries of independent Belgium were badly fixed. The Treaty of the XXIV Articles is a work full of mental reservations, revealing, here ignorance or distrust, there hostility or ambitious hopes. The country is open at the three extremities of the triangle it forms; it has no political or military boundaries anywhere.

And this sagacious observer, who foresaw the catastrophe of 1914, asserted in his memoirs:

> The destiny of Belgium is intimately bound up with the possession and control of the two rivers that cross it. . . . The Meuse is a political and military line the occupation of which from Dinant to below Maestricht is the true condition of our independence. . . . The statesmen of 1830, in demanding with such supreme energy from the Conference the possession of Luxemburg, Limburg, and Zeeland Flanders, were obeying a profound perception of the necessities of our national existence.[14]

Alas! The people were so discouraged that these lofty aims were kept alive only in the hearts of a few. Belgian patriotism after 1839 was nothing but a sentimental tendency. It was not founded on a body of doctrines inspired by the lessons of history and susceptible of deter-

[14] E. Banning, "Considérations politiques sur la défense de la Meuse," p. 83.

mining the action of statesmen. Belgium, hopeless, condemned by its neutral status to retire within itself, forgot the dismemberment of 1839. The real reasons for the blow struck at the young nation grew obscure, and therein is to be found the true explanation of the fact that Belgium, emerging victorious from the Great War, surrounded by universal prestige, found herself nevertheless powerless to efface the visible traces of the wrongs her enemies had inflicted on her a century before.

Chapter XI

THE DECLINE OF THE CATHOLIC-LIBERAL ENTENTE

The ratification of the treaties of 1839 marked the end of the revolutionary period. The boundaries of independent Belgium were finally established. She had surrendered to her fate. In the interior the organization of the State was almost accomplished. The provincial law, the communal law, the law relative to courts and tribunals had been adopted. A considerable number of members of Parliament had acquired experience in public affairs, as cabinet ministers. The great conflict with Holland was ended and Orangism was a mere meaningless survival. Austria and Prussia, satisfied with having imposed their hostile views on Belgium, consented to establish friendly relations with a neutral power from which they had nothing to fear. Only distant Russia remained sullen and persisted in seeing in Léopold I only a king of the barricades.

Internal politics were about to become a matter of major interest. Up to this time the external dangers of the country had dominated all other considerations, but now that the existence of the kingdom was no longer directly in question party struggles began again, timidly at first, then more decidedly as all eyes were turned away from the frontier. The Catholics and the Liberals, whose union had assured the triumph of the Revolution, each

sought, as was natural, to prevail in the Government. The great and difficult problem of education had been prudently avoided, but its discussion could be put off no longer, and created a conflict that remained the chief issue of Belgian politics until 1914.

In the struggle, which grew constantly more bitter, the King had to take part. We have seen him at work since 1831 in diplomatic affairs and on problems of organization, encroaching sometimes on the rôle of his less competent and less well-informed ministers. These peculiar obligations of the Crown, as the permanent authority of the center of the State, he continued to fulfil with vigilance. But the slow formation of well-organized political parties imposed on him new duties; he was now called on to play the classic rôle of constitutional monarch in a normal country. He had to form ministries, reconcile conflicting influences, accord or refuse to the cabinet appeal to the electors—in short, put into operation those provisions of the Constitution through which the Congress had sought to transplant the English parliamentary system to Belgium. The issues raised by the external situation of Belgium had cut across party lines. Among both Catholics and Liberals there had been partizans of a prudent policy and supporters of a bolder course. The acceptance of the treaty eliminated the cause of these divergences, which politically separated friends and allied adversaries. Little by little the Right and the Left strengthened their respective organizations. The Center disappeared.

The Catholics, delighted with the religious freedom guaranteed them by the Constitution, of which they had decided to make the widest use, did not claim power for

themselves alone. They were satisfied with the "Union" which had made the Revolution and asked only its continuance. But they thought themselves strong enough not to be sacrificed as they had felt they were under the Regency and during the King's second ministry, when their influence had not been proportionate to their strength. They wished a Government respectful of religion, pledged not to interfere with liberty of teaching and liberty of worship. They instinctively distrusted the State which, under the Austrian, French, and Dutch régimes, had in varying degrees shown itself a persecutor. They were glad to take advantage of their participation in the Government to accentuate its relinquishment of such powers. A few young men, political disciples of Lamennais, although strictly orthodox, seized upon this distrust of power as a fundamental principle of their action and sought to apply it in all directions.

Belgium was profoundly Catholic. This fact led the Right not to push to their last logical conclusions certain principles admitted in the formation of the alliance of the Liberal and Catholic opposition in 1829. In the matter of education, particularly, the Catholics did not admit that separation of Church and State should carry with it systematic religious neutrality on the part of the public school.

The Liberals were equally faithful to the Constitution. But their leaders, lawyers, and Parliamentarians, brought up on French doctrines, had not the same sentimental attachment for the Union. The manner in which the Catholics adapted themselves to the régime of liberty alarmed them. They rather feared rivals who had the advantage of the ancient organization of the Church,

strongly rooted in the soil and embracing the whole country in its network of services. As to education, they hesitated to trust fully to liberty. Many among them thought that the provisions of the Constitution on this subject ought to be given the strictest interpretation; the State, neutral and laic by definition, could not in their opinion give, or even favor, anything but non-religious instruction. Among the Liberals, as time went on, the number of adversaries of Christianity increased; the anti-clerical note became preponderant. More and more they declared themselves spiritual sons of the French Revolution. They were decidedly authoritarian and devoted to the theory of the absolute sovereignty of the law, deified in its essence and in its source.

The Catholics, however attached to the Union, however good servants of the Constitution they declared themselves, were, because of their traditional dogmatic intolerance, at some political disadvantage in a State founded on the enthusiastic recognition of all the modern liberties. The Encyclical *Mirari Vos* of 1832 had fixed their doctrinal position. To be sure, they were too clear-sighted to think for an instant of imposing on any one their faith or the practices of their religion, but they refused to consent to setting up religious indifference as the official doctrine of the State. The Union, of which they were partizans, was, unfortunately, only a coalition. As to these delicate matters it had been able to work out neither an original religious doctrine nor a theory of government. It remained an association, for specific ends, of moderate men each of whom retained his own opinion.

The great word "Liberty" sufficed the patriots in the days of crisis; but when it came to detailed legislation and

administration, it was necessary to be specific. The position of the Catholics would have been infinitely stronger if they had better understood the Thomist teachings, which at the same time justify and limit the derogations from pure doctrine demanded by the imperious need of social peace in a country of divided beliefs. A clearer notion of their rights and duties as citizens would have established the sincerity of the Catholics and would later have saved them from mistakes arising from theological inflexibility unsuited to political controversies.

The Liberals, a goodly number of whom, in the beginning at least, practised the observances of religion, were above all politically minded. Their writings and addresses show how little they knew of the Church and its dogmas, its discipline, or its philosophy. They did not understand it. Most of them did not see Belgian Catholicism in its concrete reality. They had no desire to adapt their theories to it or in the interests of peace to satisfy Catholic consciences rightly or wrongly alarmed by their proposals. Concerning the relations of Church and State they had clear-cut opinions, drawn from the philosophy of the eighteenth century. They desired to legislate with authority, at the risk of building an edifice which its users would not want. There were among them Josephist survivals [1] strangely mingled with Consular reminiscences and Voltairian conceptions.

The result was a notion of liberty still very incomplete, encumbered with a thousand memories of the past. Without impugning in any way the motives of Frère-Orban,

[1] Emperor Joseph II had attempted reforms interfering with the privileges of the Church.—*Translators.*

for example, it is interesting to observe that it was precisely in the name of Liberty that this young man, whose star was rising, sought to prevent any subsidizing of Catholic schools. It was in the name of Liberty that he wished to prevent the solicitation of private benevolences, and still in the name of Liberty that he refused to give a legal existence to private charitable foundations or even to an institution of general utility like the University of Louvain.

To the Liberals "liberty" meant political liberty alone. They were still haunted by the specter of the *ancien régime*. Among them, however, was to be noted a keener understanding of government than among the Catholics. By tradition they were less inclined to excessive decentralization, and had less fear of a strong executive authority. Also it was among them that the new-born State had recruited its strongest defenders.

The newspapers, the speeches, and the pamphlets of the period impress one with the fact that at the bottom of the controversies which more and more separated the Right from the Left was a lack of mutual understanding. The evil had been increasing. Unbelievers, in great numbers, had seen the Church only through the pages of Eugène Sue. Abuse of the convents and of the nursing orders most worthy of respect became the current coin of argument. It was like a mirage, deceiving a part of the citizens regarding their brothers and teaching ill-will. The Catholics, on the other hand, seem not to have been very fortunate in their choice of a battle-ground. The episcopacy, for example, by insisting obstinately upon indirect control of public instruction through the censorship of text-books and approval of the teaching personnel, had

arrayed against the Church all the Liberals, anticlericals, and loyal Catholics alike. In this field the bishops gained nothing lasting. Their demands, logical enough in a system of religious teaching, violently shocked the opposition jurists, passionately resolved to deny the Church any power outside the sanctuary.

However, the personal attitude of many of the Liberals was kindly, and one cannot help feeling that more of lightness, more of flexibility would have brought better results. Lebeau, Liberal by tradition and temperament, did not hesitate to assert in the Chamber in 1841 that in his eyes, "from a purely political point of view, for the maintenance of order, for the execution of the laws, a country curate is worth more than a hundred gendarmes." The necessity for the presence of the priest in the school and the close relationship between religion and morals were still only feebly contested. In these conditions it is probable that the Catholics would have obtained more from their adversaries if, without sacrificing their principles, they had shown themselves more adaptable, and had left off denouncing every school where the teaching was contrary to their beliefs.

To impose on all public instruction a Catholic character would have presupposed a unanimity in society which in fact did not exist. When the clergy made, as a condition of their coöperation, requirements highly irritating to the Left, they dug a ditch which has never been filled up. Would it not have been better vigorously to affirm the right of citizens to have at their disposal Catholic educational establishments for those who desired them and neutral ones for the rest? Would it not have been better energetically to defend the principle of free schools sub-

sidized by the State, instead of trying to establish legally the supremacy of ecclesiastical authority in the public schools—which, however legitimate in the eyes of believers, was certainly not in harmony with the spirit of the times? In a country in which the majorities are shifting and power passes from hand to hand, organic laws, to be lasting, cannot be the work of a single group. They must be the expression of a substantially general agreement. Lay control of education was an essential test of liberalism. The Liberal party would not consent to serious departures from that principle, and its electoral strength enabled it to have its way.

In March, 1840, the de Theux ministry, beaten on a minor question imprudently brought to an issue, retired. It was worn out by its long administration and by the bitter debates of the preceding year. The resignations of de Merode and d'Huart, who had not been replaced by men of similar prestige, had been a fatal blow. The cabinet, more and more inclined toward the Right, did not enjoy the firm and constant support of the Catholics themselves. On the Left, the number of its opponents had increased. The King wrote to Metternich on May 25, 1840:

> The Belgians have the bad habit of always complaining, even when their lot is on the whole endurable, so that to one who does not know this trait it always seems as if the most terrible catastrophe were about to take place. Giving vent to their mania for always finding fault, they have also criticized the administration of M. de Theux, who has nevertheless been minister for six years, and has had a career which does him honor.[2]

[2] Archives of Foreign Affairs. Correspondence of Léopold I with Metternich.

The King, dissatisfied with the attitude of a part of the Right, for whose democratic ideas he felt a lively distrust, offered the premiership first to Baron d'Huart, and on d'Huart's refusal called on Lebeau. Perhaps he wished to efface the memory of the crisis of 1834. Lebeau, keeping the post of Foreign Affairs for himself, placed Rogier in charge of Public Works and Instruction, Liedts of the Interior, Leclercq of Justice, and Mercier of Finance. General Buzen received the portfolio of War.

The ministry this time clearly belonged to the Left-Center and included no Catholics. Lebeau had wished to form a homogeneous cabinet, a real group of friends, animated by the same principles, strictly united in thought and action. The new ministers bound themselves by reciprocal engagements which accentuated their community of views, including the understanding that the cabinet should act as a whole in all important administrative matters, among them appointments to the higher ranks of the army—previously left to the discretion of the King and the Minister of War.

The political complexion of this cabinet was not necessitated by the party situation in Parliament, which had undergone no change. It was explained by the personality of Lebeau, who always desired to give the executive power the maximum of force and of cohesion. The King turned to him because he was the most prominent member of the accidental majority that had overthrown de Theux. On two occasions already Lebeau had directed the Government in critical circumstances, with authority and competence. Furthermore, he had ideas on foreign policy which coincided with those of the King. He wished to establish bonds of friendship between Belgium and the

German nations. Reconciliation with Holland was part of the program, and he was therefore particularly qualified to undertake to carry out the recent treaty of peace. A short term as Belgian Minister to the Germanic Confederation at Frankfort had further enlarged his understanding of Europe.

But the Right keenly resented its exclusion. This ministry, which included none of its members, inspired it with distrust, and this distrust was accentuated when in the "Revue Nationale" Devaux, a great friend of the premier and sometimes called the invisible president of the council, glorified his fellow-partizans at the expense of their predecessors, to the point of asserting that the Liberal party alone was qualified to hold office. In his opinion the day of the Union was over and it was necessary to renounce "the spirit of negativism and abstention" which had characterized the mixed ministries.

The cabinet, however, began with declarations of an irreproachable Unionism; it preserved the same high administrative personnel as the de Theux ministry, and it could not be charged, during its brief career, with any reprehensible act of intolerance. The accusation of a tendency in that direction, which was made by the Right, was justified solely by the imprudent language and excessive enthusiasm of some friends of the ministry. Lebeau always denied any intention of modifying in 1840 the political orientation of the Government, and he justified the make-up of his ministry on personal grounds. In his eyes, there was on the Right, excepting the ministers who had just resigned, no one qualified to become a minister.

A lively newspaper controversy was soon in progress. The cabinet was harassed and the announcement of bills

relative to education kept the pot a-boiling. The debates on the budget of 1841 were the occasion of several passages of arms. When the budget for public works and education was presented by Charles Rogier, a great political debate ensued. The ministry obtained a majority of ten in the Chamber, but several members who remained faithful to the ministry expressed their disapproval of any weakening of the Union.

In the Senate the struggle was still warmer. In the course of the discussion on the budget of the Interior, certain members of the Right, not wishing to go so far as to refuse the appropriations asked for, but wishing to accomplish something practical, proposed an address to the King drawing his attention "to the deplorable divisions which have been manifested during this session in the bosom of the national legislature." These divisions, said the address—which was adopted on the spur of the moment, by a vote of 23 to 19—are "a new proof of the powerlessness of legislative assemblies to deal with the real needs of the nation when parties are alienated instead of being drawn closer together." They invited the King "to put an end to these deadly divisions," to turn toward "wise and moderate" men who would aid the Crown to fulfil its conciliatory mission. The meaning of this proceeding was clear, and Count de Briey made it plain by suggesting openly to the ministers that they sacrifice themselves for the sake of public tranquillity.

The stand taken by the Senate Right caused great excitement. The Left contended that the upper house had exceeded its constitutional rights in attacking the cabinet, which had found a favorable majority in the Chamber. The Liberal press uttered cries of fury. Some of the large

cities sent petitions in opposition to the address. The peaceful state of mind that had made Unionism possible disappeared completely.

For the second time Léopold found himself faced with a serious Parliamentary difficulty.

The cabinet asked the King to dissolve Parliament. Lebeau indicated in a report to the King, under date of March 28, 1841, the reasons which in his opinion justified an appeal to the electors, to which the King had shown himself strongly opposed. A dissolution constituted in the first place the most logical means of establishing harmony between the two Chambers. Furthermore, the proximity of partial elections made desirable a complete renewal of the Chamber of Representatives in order to put a stop to agitation and to end the uncertainty prevailing as to the will of the nation. Lebeau, believing that the Liberal party would soon be in the majority anyway, thought that it would be better to facilitate this result in advance of the ordinary elections of 1843, so as to avoid the bitterness of a long struggle. Lebeau, knowing he was opposing the convictions of the King, who was deeply interested in Unionism, added: "Our conviction has had to be very strong to resist the powers of reasoning which distinguish your Majesty."

As a step toward conciliation, he declared that he would be contented with a dissolution of the Senate. This seemed to him indispensable, since the majority of the upper house had pronounced itself against the cabinet and had resorted to a mode of intervention "if not unconstitutional, at least dangerous, irregular, and which ought not to be tolerated by the Crown." His political honor appeared to him to be at stake, and in view of the rumors

that were afloat, of a difference of opinion between the King and the cabinet, he considered he had the right to a public manifestation of the confidence of the sovereign.

Léopold hesitated for three weeks. He did not believe, like Lebeau, that the time had come to give up mixed ministries. Belgium seemed to him still to have need of the coöperation of the good citizens of all parties, and in his eyes it was important that ministries should be made up from all sections of Parliament. The recent debates had unfortunately modified the country's opinion of the character of the cabinet. In fact, it was now a Liberal ministry which demanded a dissolution in the hope of overcoming its adversaries. The King refused. Writing on April 14 to Baron d'Huart, Léopold very frankly explained his attitude. He would have wished that the cabinet acquiesce in some modification of its membership in the Unionist direction. Instead, the ministers had taken a combative attitude which offended him.

"Dissolutions," said the King, "may sometimes be useful, but they are always the exception and not the rule. This time it could take place only for the purpose of crushing all the Catholics, and must result in a profound division of the country, already too weak and too exposed by its geographic position and its interior organization."

Léopold criticized especially the means employed to influence the Chambers, the Crown, and the country, and he declared that under such conditions his acquiescence in the dissolution "would have become an act of cowardice." [3]

The cabinet thereupon resigned. "Sire, it is a denial of

[3] Corti et Buffin, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

justice!" cried Lebeau. They parted, much provoked with each other. At the end of May the King in a letter to Victoria expressed himself severely on the conduct of his outgoing ministers, and he concluded with these characteristic words:

> In politics, a great rule ought to be to rule with the things which one *knows already,* and not to jump into something entirely new of which no one can do more *than guess the consequences.* . . . One knows what he has, one does not at all know what he will have.[4]

And the sovereign showed that he was irritated that Lebeau and Rogier had, as he said, kept their colleagues "under the yoke." The ministers, on the contrary, believed that court influences had been systematically hostile to the Left, and as a result there was undeniable ill-feeling.

Nothomb formed a cabinet from the Center and Right. But this victory of Unionism was short-lived. The leaders of the Left now unanimously repudiated it. At the opening of Parliament they argued openly for party government, and Lebeau, for the first time in opposition, broke with his former ally. "It is the hour," cried Nothomb, "in which Burke and Fox are separated!" With overpowering eloquence, the premier strove to demonstrate that the union of Catholics and Liberals should still remain the law of the young State. He developed the idea that the country should not become the field of conquest of any group, that the Government should arbitrate party disputes and not become the prize of combat. In vain! The position of the Left had been

[4] Léopold I to Victoria, May 31, 1841.

definitely taken, and personal ill-feeling was soon added to reasons of principle to make agreement impossible.

The Nothomb ministry secured, however, a majority in the two Chambers, where the floating element still retained the preponderance, and in 1842 succeeded in passing almost unanimously a law on primary education. The adoption of this honorable compromise, which in letter if not in spirit lasted until 1879, was sufficient to justify the attitude taken by the King. He found his ministry "really, astonishingly good." He strove by every means to smooth the road for it, notably by appealing to Rome to induce the episcopate to withdraw the measure granting corporate existence to the University of Louvain which, strangely, threatened a new explosion. But Unionism was no longer in the hearts of either party. The ministry, strengthened by the entrance of two Liberals, General Goblet and M. Mercier, lasted until the elections of 1845, by which the Liberals gained several seats, notably in Antwerp and Brussels.

Léopold then thought of entrusting power to the moderate Liberals. He even had the views of Charles Rogier sounded. But the leaders of the Left had not lost their bitter feeling toward the Crown, and had no further intention of governing under the control of a Parliament of which they were not the masters. This provoked a new conflict with the King.

Rogier, urged by his friends, Devaux especially, informed Léopold that he would accept the ministry only if the King would promise in advance a dissolution in case of difficulties with the Chambers. The unofficial discussions stopped there and the King addressed himself to Van de Weyer, who returned from London to form a new

mixed ministry of brief duration. Van de Weyer, last representative of the Liberalism of 1830, denounced before Parliament the demands of his former friends:

"The honorable member," said he to Rogier, "demanded the right of dissolution, not on a given question nor on a disagreement already arisen between the Chamber and the ministry, but in general, and without the Crown's being in a position to judge the expediency, of the necessity of this great political measure. It was, then, a kind of royal power with which he wished to be invested . . . in a word, it was the abdication, in favor of the honorable member, of the rights and prerogatives of the Crown. I conceive that a ministry on the eve of its formation may make its conditions, and, foreseeing a divergence of opinion on a given question, demand, in case of disagreement with the Chamber, the right of dissolving it, and even that this right may be unlimited, but when, irrespective of the debates which may arise in the assembly, a minister has the right to hold over your heads this formidable weapon to turn the minority party into the majority party, I say that is not representative government, but the threat of a veritable coup d'état. I say that it is to demand the virtual abdication of the Crown, that it is to expose that Royalty without which Belgium would not exist to humiliations which we should repel with all our strength."

Rogier, directly put on trial, was able to dodge the issue by taking refuge behind the purely unofficial character of his parleys with the Crown. In March, 1846, however, the question came up again and on that occasion public explanations had to be exchanged.

Van de Weyer and his colleagues, not having been able to come to an agreement on the subject of the law relative to the secondary schools, resigned. Léopold again called upon Rogier. The leader of the Left repeated his demand as to an eventual dissolution of the Parliament, but took pains to state that he demanded this right "for a definite time and for definite cases." The King, through van Praet, in a letter of March 27, set forth his unchanged point of view. Said the minister of the royal household:

> The position taken by his Majesty can be summed up in a few words. The King assures you of his coöperation and of his confidence. If he had not felt so about you he would not have called upon you to form a ministry. No absolute refusal to dissolve the Chambers or to dismiss hostile functionaries has been given you. His Majesty, I repeat, had as to the dissolution and functionaries made no decision. He wished to remain judge of the facts and of the question of expediency. This position is the only one which, constitutionally, the King can accept. Every other, in the eyes of the King, deviates from the rule and destroys the constitutional equilibrium.

The Liberals standing firm, the King formed a ministry from the Right, which was supported by Parliament. In the course of the debate that ensued in the Chamber, de Muelenaere defended the thesis developed by van Praet.

"Dissolution," he said in his speech of April 26, "is a measure legal, regular, and constitutional. The expediency of this measure depends upon a consideration of the facts which render it useful or necessary. In any case, the use of this power should be a free act of royal discretion. The King cannot be bound by any preëxisting engage-

ment, of any nature whatever. Up to the last moment the King should remain free to decide against Parliament and send it back to the judgment of the country, or to decide against his ministers and replace them with others."

How truly the royal prerogative was at stake in 1846 and in 1847 is shown by the fact that certain friends of Rogier went so far as to advise him to demand from the King, at the formation of the cabinet, the signature of a decree of dissolution with the date in blank. The pettiness of such a precaution was scarcely compatible with the respect due the Crown. It reveals a tendency which the King had well guessed. He wrote to Metternich on April 21:

> M. Rogier has had the kindness to propose to me to confide to him *pro tempore,* and if possible for a long time, the few royal prerogatives which the Constitution clearly specifies, so that he can intimidate the Chamber and become its master and our master in the Chamber. I thanked him forthwith, and I expressed to him my desire to keep for myself my clearly specified rights. . . .[5]

Léopold did not wish to hasten an evolution which he deplored. Convinced that the advantages of Unionism were greater than its inconveniences, he considered that he ought not to take the lead in establishing clear-cut party divisions in the Chambers. His resistance earned for him bitter reproaches. Paul Hymans tells us:

> They imputed to him sentiments of antipathy to Liberalism. In imitation of what was going on in France with regard to Louis-Philippe, attacks of every kind were directed against Léopold I. Libels and coarse caricatures tended to discredit and ridicule the

[5] A. De Ridder, "Un diplomate autrichien à Bruxelles," in the "Bulletin de la Commission royale d'Histoire," 1925, p. 133.

royal person. Republican and Socialist ideas were expressed. An unwholesome excitement agitated certain circles.[6]

Some members of the Left made a point of omitting the toast to the King in the programs of the banquets they organized. One day at Tournai, Barthélemy Dumortier spontaneously rose to propose in glowing terms the health of the sovereign. Léopold thanked him in an autograph letter in which he remarked with a touch of melancholy:

> I have always been touched by the good and generous sentiments which I have noted in you; these sentiments deserve all the more to be praised because the fashion is not in their favor and great force of character is necessary to keep them so pure when everything conspires against them.[7]

However, when the elections of June, 1847, had given to the Liberal party an incontestable majority in the Chamber, the King agreed to the formation of a Liberal cabinet. His resistance sprang primarily from his attachment to the true principle of parliamentary government, the wise delays of which are poorly understood by parties.

The Liberal party had acquired in 1846, through a Congress of three hundred and fifty delegates from all parts of the country, an organization and a platform. The chief item in its program was the "independence of the civil power," a vague phrase by which was meant putting public instruction completely under lay control. The meeting in the capital of this kind of gathering which, under the cover of the liberty of association guaranteed

[6] Hymans, "Frère-Orban," Vol. I, p. 112.
[7] Léopold I to Barth. Dumortier, Nov. 5, 1845. Letter contributed by M. A. De Ridder.

by the Constitution, appeared to have a sinister likeness to the clubs that had terrorized the revolutionary assemblies in France, made a lively impression on the public in Belgium and abroad. Louis-Philippe, then so near his fall, was worried and wrote, out of his old experience, beseeching his son-in-law to seek for means of breaking this new power.

Leopold knew better than the King of the French the mechanism of free government and the alarms inherent in such a régime. He did not share, therefore, that monarch's exaggerated terrors, although he feared pressure upon his ministers from the outside and the interference of irresponsible agents. Firmin Rogier, writing to his brother Charles of a conversation with the King, represents him as disposed in 1847 to forestall the evils feared by Louis-Philippe, by calling some advanced Liberals into the Government, so that they might serve an apprenticeship to power in which they would be "less dangerous than they are outside of this same power, wishing to dominate and direct it." [8] A sage reflection! A truly monarchical idea which could come only to a far-sighted leader, absolutely free from the passions of the party struggle! The King had not taken sides in the quarrels of his subjects. He sought to utilize to the best interests of the State all the elements of its political life.

The accession in 1847 of a Liberal ministry determined to inaugurate a new policy, marked the final defeat of Unionism. The King loyally coöperated with the cabinet, striving only to moderate its demands, especially with regard to changes in the high administrative personnel.

[8] Discailles, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 179.

He welcomed the new men. Up to this time he had worked with ministers who had known the difficult years of the period of organization of the State. Another generation was now coming to the front, of which Frère-Orban was the most brilliant representative. He had not shared in the struggle for existence which had tempered the pugnacity of his elders by conflict with the external dangers threatening Belgium. Léopold feared to find in this popular young minister "one of those Liégois heads a little too lively and too ardent." [9] He saw with pleasure his work as an administrator and appreciated his talent for affairs, but could not share the sentiments which led him to attack the influence of the Church.

The King was full of sympathy for the Church; he considered it one of the great national forces; he appreciated its moral power, its instinctive love of order. "One can deal with the Catholic Church, just as well as with the Anglican," said he in 1863, to his daughter Charlotte.[10] He saw in the Catholics disciplined subjects, disposed to obedience. "It is a party which, if once it is devoted to any one, remains true to him, which the Voltairians do not. . . . Obedience is still the rule in that Church and in that lies its strength."

The King had found the Catholic Church free from any limitation, even from any contact with or supervision from the Government. Perfectly understanding its nature, he nevertheless wished, for the public good, to exercise a discreet influence over it in order to harmonize its efforts with those of the Government. He sought to

[9] Discailles, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 180.
[10] Corti, "Maximilien et Charlotte," Vol. I, p. 247.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 299.

bring this about by establishing cordial diplomatic relations with the Holy See, so as to be able to influence the bishops through the only authority which possessed uncontested supremacy over them. The Catholics, remembering the subordination of the Church in the days of the Napoleonic Concordat, were reluctant to have a direct representative of the Pope at the court. The King made haste slowly. He enlisted the aid of Metternich and obtained from Rome first an internuncio, then a nuncio, with whom he kept in very frequent contact. Through him he could exercise a moderating influence on the sometimes very militant activity of the bishops.

He soon had a word to say in the nomination of bishops. Mgr. Fornari to begin with, and later Mgr. Pecci, showed the greatest deference for the views of the sovereign. Mgr. Pecci, who was to become illustrious as Pope Leo XIII, valued very highly Léopold's political ideas. Conway, Controller of the Civil List, cultivated him assiduously. Just as the nuncio was leaving Belgium and at the moment when he was in conflict with Nothomb over the application of the new law on education, Conway said of him to the King:

"I can affirm on my honor that in the very intimate relations which I have had with him I have been able to see that his ideas on the position of the Catholics in Belgium are entirely just, and that he is very desirous of supporting the views of the King and of his Government, and of acquiring a real influence upon the bishops. His correspondence with the Holy See has been all that could be expected of an agent of the King himself, so faithfully did it express the thoughts of his Majesty." [12]

[12] Papers of Viscount de Conway. Conway to the King, Oct. 3, 1845.

In later years the great pontiff always liked to recall the cordiality of his relations with the Belgian court, and in his policy with regard to Belgium he more than once acted on principles ascribable to Léopold. As nuncio he had enough confidence in the King for Conway to be able to write:

> Mgr. Pecci has begged me to give to your Majesty the formal assurance that it never would enter his thought to deal with a matter so important as the replacement of a bishop without informing your Majesty of it, and without asking your opinion of the candidates proposed to the Holy See.[13]

By his diplomacy, Léopold I thus assured the State—although the Constitution formally forbade anything like a concordat—a practical means of maintaining relations of cordial understanding with the Church.[14] He had, in fact, obtained for the Government from the Holy See much more than his Liberal ministers would have dared to ask. But they were so in love with the principle of the separation of Church and State that they could not see the need for treating questions within the province of spiritual authority with tact and adaptability, by methods consonant with ecclesiastical doctrine and discipline.

The King maintained also constant relations with the Archbishop of Malines, Cardinal Sterckx, a distinguished prelate full of wisdom and dignity. He frequently sent van Praet or Conway to see him, had him come to the palace at Laeken, and sometimes wrote to him directly. On the questions relative to the status of the Church, he

[13] *Ibid.*, Nov. 29, 1844.
[14] Cf. A. De Ridder, "Léopold I^{er} et les catholiques belges" in the "Revue catholique des Idées et des Faits," Sept. 30, 1927.

also consulted Mgr. de Ram, the rector of the University of Louvain, against whom he had at first been somewhat prejudiced, but whom he afterward learned to esteem.

The Left dealt with religious questions without overmuch ceremony; but the far-sighted monarch refused to see in the strife created by the proposals of his Liberal ministers an object worthy of absorbing the almost exclusive attention of the Government. In offering the power to Rogier, July 8, 1847, he wrote to him:

> This country is poor in political ideas, and often appears disposed to lose sight of the bases on which its political existence as a European State reposes. There are two kinds of states: the first exist by reason of their own strength, the second, because of certain conditions which are to be found in the convenience of the large states and in the destiny which the great European family desires to see them attain and fulfil. Belgium belongs in the second class. It has been very difficult for her to take her place, but I believe I do not flatter myself too much in saying that the position I have created for her in Europe is excellent and much surpasses what she could have hoped for in 1830; nothing, then, should be done to lose it.

And later he wrote:

> We must avoid allowing ourselves to be dominated by the influences of political cliques so as to be carried off our feet. *Mon Dieu!* if Belgium occupied the position of the Sandwich Islands, if we were 1,500 leagues from every neighbor, we should be perfectly free to give ourselves the most democratic régime possible; no one would be disturbed by it.[15]

The King disliked to acquiesce in plans contrary to his conception of the public good. He warned his ministers; he lavished advice upon them; by his calculated delays he

[15] Discailles, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 164.

made them feel the force of his objections. But the pupil of the prudent Stockmar did not, like Louis-Philippe, desire to play at the same time the rôles of king and minister. He did not seek to influence public opinion. He knew better than his father-in-law the price of royal irresponsibility. Besides, had he not time on his side—time which soothes the short-lived excitements raised by problems such as the legal status of the Church, the administration of cemeteries?

These questions, which absorbed the attention of Belgian statesmen, the King instinctively put in their true place. After many years crowded with excitement, he grew tired at times of the daily routine of constitutional monarchy. He escaped from it to play an amateur part in the great game of European politics, with which the Belgian ministers scarcely cared to tamper. He escaped also by turning his thoughts toward the mysterious East, which fascinated him. The King, already renowned for the sagacity and weight of his judgment, had kept a corner of his heart for the romanticism of his youth.

"Belgium," he said one day, "is only prose; it is Greece which would have satisfied the poetic needs of my soul." He wrote to Victoria on September 21, 1839:

> I have all the honours that can be given, and I am, politically speaking, very solidly established, more so than most Sovereigns in Europe. The only political longing I still have is for the Orient, where I perhaps shall once end my life—unlike the sun, rising in the West and setting in the East.

In 1840 he spoke again to his niece of the East, "that great object of my predilection." October 22, 1841, he wrote to Victoria: "I would I could make a change of

office with Otho; he would be the gainer in solids, and I should have sun and an interesting country."

He spoke of it to Baron Nothomb in 1856, as of a great opportunity missed.

"To consider only the present," he said, "Belgium is certainly worth more than Greece; I should have had personally a less agreeable life, but the dynasty I should have founded would have had a greater future. I should not have lived in isolation on the ruins of Athens, without relations with the sovereigns and statesmen of the Occident; I should have accustomed them to appeal to me, and I should have been able to make the best of every opportunity without fear of provoking any one." [16]

Does it not seem as if under the gray sky of Laeken the aging King of the Belgians still had in his ears the echo of Byron's impassioned songs, which had intoxicated his generation and moved the heart of the melancholy master of Claremont?

[16] Baron Nothomb, "Essai sur la Révolution belge," Preface p. xiv.

Chapter XII

THE VICTORY OF 1848

On the evening of February 25, 1848, while the official world of Brussels was gathered in the salons of the Ministry of Public Works, where M. and Mme. Frère-Orban were giving a ball, news arrived that Paris was in revolt, the republic proclaimed, and Louis-Philippe and the royal family in flight, their whereabouts unknown. It had been known for two days that the situation in the French capital was very disturbing, and King Léopold, long worried over the future of his father-in-law, had sent his faithful van Praet to Paris to obtain precise information.

The announcement of the unexpected downfall of a régime which enjoyed the support of Parliament, and the confidence of the nation as a whole, threw Belgium into consternation. The July Monarchy was her elder sister. After a long struggle sown with tragic episodes, it had vanquished the parties of disorder. To the outside world it had shown the face of an enlightened France, anxious for peace, respectful of the rights of other nations. Louis-Philippe incarnated the supremacy of a bourgeoisie cured of its illusions, desirous of closing the wounds left gaping by the bloody revolutionary epoch.

In two days of riot the bourgeois monarchy, benevolent to the citizen and reassuring to the foreigner, had been swept away almost without resistance, and the Paris mob,

that savage despot of the days of 1789 and 1790, had again mounted the throne. The Republic at Paris! These words were heavy with meaning for those who had lived through the tragic years of the Convention and the Directory. Was the torrent that Bonaparte had dammed up once more let loose? Were the bloody horrors of a half-century before to be repeated?

It was soon apparent that the new revolution was not a mere political movement. The Provisional Government of Louis Blanc and Ledru-Rollin represented the most turbulent groups in a fevered city. Little by little, Brussels learned of the installation of universal suffrage, the creation of national workshops, and the rise of a wave of democracy overwhelming the established authorities and threatening all Europe with its tumultuous flood. The Parisian explosion immediately had its repercussion in every quarter. By March 15, Berlin was in revolt and Vienna in revolution. Frederick William IV had to hoist the colors of the insurrection; Metternich, the most prominent representative of reaction, was put to flight.

The movement extended everywhere that nationalist agitation had undermined authority imposed by force—in Hungary, in Bohemia, and in Lombardy. Soon from Ireland to the Vistula, from the Tiber to the Danube, thrones were threatened, tottered, and fell. Belgium found herself in the center of a veritable political and social earthquake that made everything uncertain—frontiers, institutions, the social order itself. Lamartine tried with his admirable eloquence and the generosity of his sentiments to limit the disaster, but he was obviously swamped. Beginning with the month of May, Paris fed a hundred thousand rioters in the national workshops;

from June 23 to 26 the capital of France was the scene of a frightful battle, and the new-born democracy, frightened by the menace it had created, had to fall back upon the dictatorship of General Cavaignac.

Belgium itself remained calm. There was not the least disorder, the slightest disturbance in the streets. Despite a frightful business crisis and widespread unemployment, revolutionary propaganda was powerless to move a people satisfied with its Government and passionately devoted to its independence. The political liberties demanded elsewhere, it had inscribed in its Constitution. It was wise enough to await the orderly course of social progress. A few French bands were easily dispersed at the frontier by the army and the gendarmerie. The Government, strong in the concurrence of all its people, did not even need to resort to exceptional measures to make the law everywhere respected. The Liberal cabinet disarmed the most advanced wing of its party by proposing to lower the tax-requirement for voting to the minimum allowed by the Constitution, and in other respects it met the crisis with a judicious series of economic and financial measures.

There was real danger, nevertheless. Belgium had been, especially since 1847, the refuge of a great number of foreign agitators who under the shelter of her liberal institutions pursued their revolutionary projects. In 1845 Karl Marx had come to Brussels to live, and in that peaceful capital he developed his doctrine and prepared the famous Communist Manifesto. The Liberal Democratic groups leaned strongly toward Socialism and extended a hearty welcome to the Republicans. M. Jottrand, for example, had entered into correspondence with

Marx, whose theories he doubtless did not understand. The German revolutionists set up in Belgium the first organ of scientific Socialism, the "Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung," which made no attempt to conceal the fact that in its eyes democratic Liberalism, by attacking the monarchy, the nobility, and the priesthood, was clearing the ground for the proletariat. Engels wrote, on January 3, 1848:

> The middle class should know that they work for us. . . . You will clear the road of the remainder of their magic and of monarchy. You must crush the patriarchal régime, more and more transform the non-possessing classes into proletarians—that is, into recruits for us. . . . You must, with your factories, your commercial relations, furnish the proletariat with the means of its deliverance. In recompense for all that you will reign, but for only a very limited time. . . .

But these incitements came to naught. The masses refused to move, and on March 2, 1848, Marx, with other foreigners who were abusing Belgium's hospitality, was expelled without the slightest popular protest.[1]

Léopold I had always been, and remained until the end of his life, convinced that the wars of the Revolution and the Empire had left the social order in a state of great fragility. Despite his stern exterior, he was at heart highly impressionable. The events at Paris made him very despondent. On February 26, 1848, he wrote to Victoria:

> I am very unwell in consequence of the *awful* events at Paris. How will this end? Poor Louise is in a state of despair which is pitiful to behold. What will soon become of us God alone knows;

[1] Cf. Thomas Basyn, "K. Marx à Bruxelles," in the "Revue générale," 1927, pp. 584-601.

great efforts will be made to revolutionize this country; as there are poor and wicked people in all countries, it may succeed. . . . Against France we, of course, have a right to claim protection from England and the other Powers. I can write no more. God bless you.

But in spite of his fears, the King went to work with vigilance, energy, and wisdom. He was not in the least a doctrinaire. The enlargement of the suffrage met with his immediate support and he stimulated the efforts of his Government to discover means of relieving the unemployed and preventing suffering with all its dangerous consequences. The rumor went about that he had offered to abdicate, and a lithograph in the taste of the epoch popularized this legend. There is no basis for believing—quite the contrary—that he had dreamed for an instant of deserting his post, but the public, prone to idolatry of numbers, became on account of the absurd rumor all the more attached to this King who respected the popular will, however wild.

The truth is that Léopold took all the measures necessary to defend the régime of which he was the guardian. On March 2 he informed Austria that he had decided to fight, if necessary, for his crown and for the independence of the country. The warmth of Belgian loyalty, the intense will to live manifested by the nation, made a deep impression on his mind. He wrote Van de Weyer on February 29:

The country is conducting itself admirably at this moment. I am also very much pleased with my ministers. They are devoted and courageous. Heaven grant that everything remains thus! I dare congratulate myself upon it. I have observed the rules of the constitutional system regularly and conscientiously. It

has even been said sometimes that I am too constitutional. I do not repent it. . . .

And he added on March 4:

I congratulate you with all my heart upon the admirable conduct of your country. You are now, and will remain, a nation. I avow that the conduct of the country has pleased me more than I can adequately express, for I have always greatly loved the people and I believe that the complete confidence I always have shown in them has been the cause of these good folk having sentiments toward me very different from those which are manifest, alas, in so many countries to-day.[2]

"Our good and admirable Belgium," said he on May 16, in a letter to Frère-Orban.

"I cannot," he wrote to Metternich on March 11, "sufficiently praise to you our country and our people; and our merit is great, because the shot ricochets over us." [3] The heart of the skeptical politician undoubtedly was touched. For the first time the King was filled with affection for the discreet and grateful nation which for seventeen years he had ruled. Pride in a task well done endeared to him the crown of Belgium, which he sometimes had found too modest for his ambition. The Emperor of Austria had to flee from Vienna, the King of Prussia was humiliated in his capital, the little Italian princes trembled on their thrones, and Louis-Philippe was an exile at Claremont. The King of the Belgians, hitherto regarded as an upstart, was almost the only sovereign on the Continent who knew no anxiety. It was he, now, who

[2] Juste, "Van de Weyer," Vol. II, pp. 94, 96.
[3] Archives of Foreign Affairs. Correspondence of Léopold I with Metternich.

stood as the example of a legitimate sovereign. In his letters to his German relatives, he could with understandable pride speak in all sincerity of his "little tranquil corner." Every time he appeared in public, at Brussels or in the provinces, there was an upwelling of enthusiasm which created a great sensation abroad. In April, after a review, the crowd broke through the cordon of police and the King on horseback in the midst of a human sea received evidences of a popularity which the peril of the country increased a hundredfold. The wisdom of the monarch inspired confidence. The monarchy seemed the most solid guaranty of independence.

Léopold in these circumstances spoke to the country as he spoke to his intimates:

"Yes," he said early in May to a delegation from Antwerp, "Belgium gives the entire world a noble and significant example of dignity and courage. I cannot without deep emotion think of the attitude taken in recent days by the whole Belgian people; by its calmness, its dignity, its courage it has proved once more that with it liberty is no novelty, and it has proved this in a striking manner. Constitutional countries, you know, gentlemen, are even more subject than others to divisions created by party spirit, but in our *belle patrie* every division has disappeared in the interest of the nation and given place to the most generous and intimate union. Every one to-day in Belgium belongs to the same party, the national party. Yes, gentlemen, our country presents a great and magnificent example, and I am proud to be the chief of so noble a nation."

At the time of the September fêtes the King expressed himself in like manner. He congratulated the country on

its attitude during this crisis without precedent in history:

"You have so far passed through it gloriously, so gloriously that many countries have adopted your political organization as a model, that your name is everywhere honored and respected, and that you must feel that such imitation and respect are deserved."

The King dwelt on the relief that the solidity of his throne gave him. To Victoria, March 25, 1848, he writes, "Curious enough that I, who in fact was desirous of retiring from politics, should be on the Continent the only Sovereign who stood the storm, though I am at ten hours' distance from Paris."

Congratulations poured in from all sides. The Queen of England wrote joyously: "*You* are held up as a pattern to the German Sovereigns, and the Belgians as a pattern to the German people." [4] From Berlin came the words: "With regard to Belgium, all the usual terms of admiration are exhausted." Still more convincing proof of the prestige acquired by the young monarchy, the King of Holland, finally persuaded of the solidity of Belgium, abandoned his sulky attitude and sought for his country the friendship of its old compatriots. He entered into secret relations with Laeken. Russia itself abandoned something of its intransigeance. Nesselrode grew bold enough to say that "Belgium in the midst of a crisis which threatened the social order has shown herself worthy of Europe's admiration."

But fate reserved for Léopold a still more personal satisfaction, a sort of revenge which seems to have been

[4] Queen Victoria to the King, Apr. 18, 1848.

granted him by a higher justice. In September, 1848, Prince Metternich, exiled, dismissed from the Grand-Mastership of reactionary policy, wrote confidentially from London to the King of the Belgians: "Personal reasons and family considerations make me desire to quit England at once for Belgium as the most tranquil country on the Continent. In fact . . . the wisdom of your Majesty has been able to save this country from the evils of a dangerous agitation." [5] To the King chosen by the Congress, to whom narrowly conservative Austria had not thought it necessary to keep its word or display ordinary courtesy, this letter must have given peculiar satisfaction.

How many times the Chancellor had made the Belgian monarchy feel that in his eyes it was tainted with original sin! How many times he had lavished upon the King, in a tone of irritating superiority, advice and exhortations to modify the character of his policy! Léopold I enjoyed this strange turn of events with that discreet good grace which was natural to him. He replied very kindly to the old prince. After having referred to the excellent spirit of the country, he said to him in closing:

I have seen with pleasure that your Highness thought of us in these circumstances; this proof of confidence has touched me greatly; also I shall be truly satisfied if your sojourn in this country is agreeable to you. Many circumstances perhaps will unite to make you happy among us. The air is more clement, life more easy here than on that beautiful isle where you are living, and I am convinced we shall do everything here to show ourselves as kind to you as you have always been to this country. We continue

[5] Metternich, "Mémoires," Vol. VIII, p. 67.

to set a splendid example and I cannot help hoping that it will produce a happy impression in the neighboring countries.

Metternich established himself at Brussels, where he lived for six months on the Boulevard de l'Observatoire. He received the heartiest welcome at court and in society. He made friends with the ministers and was astonished not to find "idle dreamers" among them. He marveled at how well the sovereign of this country, whose task he had so greatly complicated by his opposition, had succeeded in "creating order out of disorder." The King silently relished his victory, and since he thought that Metternich might yet be useful to him, he spared no pains to give him a reassuring impression of Belgium. The whole man is seen in this incident—an instinctive elegance of voice and manner, a scarcely perceptible irony, an adroit alacrity in taking the tricks while sparing the wounded vanity of his fellow-players. This great politician had decidedly the grand manner.

The increasing reputation of the King of the Belgians led certain German politicians to think of him as the chief of the new Empire of Germany reorganized by the Assembly of Frankfort. Léopold did not reject the overtures made him. He had his agents on the ground and received mysterious visitors at Brussels. The project, exceedingly dangerous for Belgium, fortunately led to nothing, but it bears witness to the prestige acquired by the King in Liberal circles across the Rhine. The fact that it was seriously studied at the palace tells us much of the patient and never satisfied ambition of the most illustrious of the Coburgs.[6]

[6] Cf. Comte Renaud de Briey, "L'Allemagne et l'avenir de l'Europe," p. 87. Corti et Buffin, *op. cit.*, p. 221

The crisis of 1848 had two important consequences. On the one hand it enhanced Belgium's importance in the eyes of the world, manifesting as it did the wisdom of the nation, the firmness of her liberal institutions, the profound vitality of her patriotism. The Constitution of 1831, considered by the reactionaries of Germany and Austria incompatible with the maintenance of durable order, acquired the prestige which trial by fire gives. It was imitated abroad, notably in Prussia. King Léopold, who had known how to take advantage of it, had gained all that poor Louis-Philippe had lost in the opinion of moderate men. The concert of praise addressed to Belgium and her chief strengthened the confidence of the country in its destiny and helped to efface the memory of past disappointments.

On the other hand, the international situation of the kingdom was modified. The France of the July Monarchy, which had been a faithful friend, soon gave way to a Bonapartist France, singularly disturbing to its weaker neighbor. The nationalist movement in Germany, which resulted in the progressive elimination of Austria to the advantage of a voracious Prussia, created on the east a danger no less formidable. Léopold realized at once the strength and the weakness of Belgium's new position.

The downfall of his father-in-law, with whom he maintained cordial family relations and a regular political correspondence, hurt him in one of his principal means of influence. After 1848 he was no longer the natural arbitrator between London and Paris; but, having established his legitimacy, the King of the Belgians could make his voice heard in chancelleries which previously had remained closed to him. His couriers found the road

to The Hague. Relations were established with St. Petersburg, and in 1852 he met the Emperor of Russia at Wiesbaden. In Belgium itself, feeling firmer ground under his feet, Léopold I dared to act more openly in using his influence in favor of putting the country in a state of defense.

Chapter XIII

THE CROWN ABOVE PARTIES

The ministry of 1847 had brilliantly faced all the dangers, internal as well as external, created by the crisis of 1848. Order once assured, it had resumed its attempt to carry out the Liberal program. On the material side its work was considerable—establishment in 1850 of the *Banque Nationale,* reform of the tariff in the direction of free trade, active promotion of public works, able and prudent financial administration. But the adoption of the law of June 1, 1850, on the secondary schools reawakened the party struggles that the gravity of the common danger had stilled. The King had not been able in this matter to get the cabinet to adopt his conciliatory views and in signing the act he had indicated objections on three important points.[1] Frère-Orban, from the beginning of his political career hostile to the law of 1842 on primary instruction, now sought to push the revision of that compromise. A bill was drawn up and discussed by the ministry. It was the forerunner of a fresh religious conflict.[2]

Léopold, desirous on principle of preserving the stability of the organic laws, was a convinced partizan of the law of 1842, which many Liberals still defended. He

[1] Discailles, *op. cit.,* Vol. III, p. 316.

[2] Cf. Van Kalken, "Esquisse des Origines du libéralisme en Belgique," in the "Revue d'Histoire Moderne," 1926.

was critical of every action of the ministry which might feed a quarrel whose virulence he never ceased to deplore. He tightened the curb, and, in the secrecy of the council, he insisted upon moderation and wisdom.

The struggle, moreover, had unfortunately invaded the field of charity. In 1849 the Minister of Justice, de Haussy, had by a radical change in administrative policy modified the rules governing the acceptance of gifts and legacies to charitable organizations. The King, who had himself noted in England the practical benefits of laws protecting the wishes of testators, did not share the apprehensions which arrayed the Liberals against religious foundations. He had van Praet write to Rogier:

> The questions relative to the acceptance of legacies and donations demand the attention of the King and also recommend themselves to yours, from the political point of view. But these questions produce what the interests of the country and reasons of state most imperiously command us to avoid—misunderstanding between parties. They are not of themselves of any great importance, or at least do not relate to matters of very considerable weight. The State has the power to prevent abuse when it exists. Can one impartially maintain that abuse exists at this moment? Is it necessary, on the other hand, to raise party questions in the face of a political situation such as that which exists in Europe, and can one compare the advantage of withholding from a rural church council the donation of a few thousand francs with that of maintaining within the country that pacification of political opinions which until now has been the honor of the cabinet? It is quite useless to try to find out which party started it; whether it was that which insists upon the most rigorous application of the law or that which ardently defends the interests of the Church. It is manifest that the danger exists, that the pretext for the struggle has been given, and that the duty of the Government is to furnish it the least nourishment possible. The King requests you

to be so kind as to keep in mind these general remarks, in the examination of these delicate questions.[3]

Unfortunately the phantoms of the past robbed the best minds of a clear perception of the needs of the present. The Liberals, in their individualist zeal, did not believe it necessary for the modern State to encourage the voluntary application of private estates to the satisfaction of certain collective needs. The fear of the "dead hand" which under the old régime had tied up too large a part of the soil, the fear of the durable influence the regular and assured possession of temporal wealth might confer on the religious orders, made them forget the lack of logic and the injustice of a system which provided for incorporating commercial companies only and placed in a state of permanent insecurity numerous educational and charitable institutions begun in accordance with rights assured by the Constitution.

De Haussy, inspired by these principles, meant to make the *bureaux de bienfaisance* the sole legal representatives of the poor capable of receiving and administering gifts and legacies, whatever might have been the wishes of the donor or the testator, whose intentions, no matter how clearly expressed, were henceforth to be ignored, through application of Article 900 of the Civil Code. He spoke as a legist and, in the spirit of the times, neglected to consider the social value of great charitable foundations.

On February 20, 1849, the King had striven to modify the views of the Minister of Justice. He would have pre-

[3] Archives of the kingdom. Papers of Ch. Rogier. Letter of M. van Praet, not dated.

ferred that as in other countries "a great latitude to benevolence" be given. He wrote:

> The two countries where the constitutional régime is best understood, England and the United States of America, put no limitations on the gifts and acts of benevolence of private individuals. The principle that an individual may bestow philanthropies and gifts on the public or on private persons as he wishes, seems to me the only one in harmony with that real liberty which every one has a right to demand in these matters. It is, moreover, evident, and this is already realized by many persons, that if we continue to thwart the wishes of donors, we shall put an end to charitable gifts and the communes will find themselves thus deprived of precious resources which are the expression of the noblest ideals.[4]

Nevertheless the cabinet pursued its course, and only recently has Belgium shown a disposition to regard this vast problem from the intelligent and progressive point of view of its first King. The distress of certain great scientific establishments, to remedy which generous efforts have been made since the war, was one of the consequences of the failure to adopt proper legislation to encourage legacies and foundations. Indeed, this was a field on which the war between the parties reached the greatest violence. The King felt that his advice was given but slight consideration, and henceforward he obstructed the proposals of the Minister of Justice with that systematic resistance and calculated slowness which was his habitual way of showing disapproval. In the latter part of August de Haussy complained to Rogier of "this intolerable position," which probably had a good deal to do with his resignation the following year. Furthermore, the cabinet as a whole was made to realize that the Crown

[4] Juste, "Léopold I^er^," p. 592.

did not approve its policy, although the Parliamentary situation obliged the King to continue it in office. On the eve of the elections of June, 1852, Rogier wrote to Léopold:

> Looking back on that difficult time in which, nevertheless, the confidence of the King in his ministers was frequently and publicly manifested, it is not without sadness that I have had to note a marked cooling of those relations of understanding and cordiality from which we drew a part of our strength. Even without overt acts, and they have not been lacking, public opinion has instincts which rarely deceive it; and I cannot hide from your Majesty that the moral force of the cabinet has been weakened, particularly in its relations with public officials.[5]

The Left lost twelve seats in the elections. The ministry experienced great difficulties in connection with a bill establishing inheritance taxes—the Chamber had rejected an article permitting the Treasury to put the heirs on oath —and because of the tariff relations with France. It resigned on July 9. The King, always faithful to his policy of moderation, tried to set up another Liberal ministry, and offered the premiership successively to Leclercq, Lebeau, and Verhaegen. Each declined and the crisis was of unusual duration, lasting until September 17. Rogier then reconstituted his cabinet without Frère-Orban, whom the King seems to have been pleased to see eliminated. But having made the election of the president of the Chamber a question of confidence, Rogier was defeated and retired a few weeks later. Léopold was thus left in a position to maneuver more freely. He formed a Liberal ministry of an altogether moderate

[5] Discailles, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 415.

cast, with de Brouckere as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faider as Minister of Justice, Piercot as Minister of the Interior. It was an almost completely extra-Parliamentary cabinet and it announced a "truce honorable for every one and fortunate for the country, which desires it."

The change of Government implied a change of policy, and, as the Left in spite of everything still had a majority in the Chambers, the process had been long and delicate. There was a crisis within the Liberal party. The King, who very much feared the tendencies manifested by Napoleon III, was desirous of reënforcing the army and wished to quarrel with no one. He had to walk softly and avoid all appearance of favoring the Right, whose hour had not come. In a letter to Thiers he explained his conduct frankly:

My task since last summer had been very difficult. The elections showed the old cabinet the door and those gentlemen decided to resign. It was desirable to proceed logically and with moderation. The most unpopular part of the cabinet had to begin by separating itself from the rest, in order to give the moderate fraction a chance. To effect such an operation in a friendly spirit and without creating discontent was not an easy thing. At last it was done.

As Frère-Orban had foreseen, the King was pleased at his departure.

The cabinet thus reconstituted actually got in motion. Against my advice it had the imprudence to stake its all on the election of a president who had needlessly irritated some members of the Chamber. The election lost, the cabinet could not remain in power. Thenceforth my plan was to form a cabinet leaning toward the Liberal party, but extra-Parliamentary. The experiment has succeeded so far. It is a capable and homogeneous cabinet.

And the King remarked ironically that his new ministers, thanks to their independence, had been able to punish a school-teacher despite the fact that he was a Liberal.[6]

The Brouckere ministry remained in power until March 2, 1855. The Right refrained from attacking it and the Left supported without controlling it. The attention of this Government was absorbed in great measure by questions of foreign policy, to which we shall refer later. As the King desired, the army was strengthened and its war effective raised to a hundred thousand men to indicate the firm intention of the country to defend its neutrality and independence, more and more threatened by France. In the interior the ministry strove to soothe public opinion and to negotiate an agreement with the bishops which would permit a peaceable application of the law on secondary education.

But the relations of the Crown with the premier seem on several occasions to have been strained. When Léopold visited Napoleon III at Calais while France was at war with Russia—without having, as may be surmised, taken the advice of de Brouckere on the opportuneness of this step—there had been the threat of a ministerial crisis, which was, however, avoided. On the other hand, Léopold, desirous of being on friendly terms with the Emperor of the French and of discovering his plans, had established direct relations with the Tuileries through the Prince de Chimay, a Belgian of high rank, related by marriage to the imperial house. The sovereign had no confidence in the mediocre diplomatic talents of

[6] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, pp. 317, 318.

the official ambassador, Firmin Rogier, who as the brother of the leader of the Left could not well be recalled. The Minister of Foreign Affairs disliked the existence of this secret mission of which the King held all the threads, and this circumstance made him the more willing to resign. The elections of 1854 further weakened the Left, and in March, 1855, the cabinet, feeling itself insufficiently supported by its party, went out of office.

Circumstances permitted a return to a combination of Unionist tendencies. The King called a deputy of the Right, Pierre De Decker, known to be hostile to strict party government. He formed a cabinet which included two moderate Liberals, who, however, could not be said to represent their party. On the whole it was a ministry of the Right and Center. The King had thus succeeded, peacefully and with the support of Parliament, in carrying out the political theory he preferred. The De Decker cabinet, which closed one period of Belgian political history, was truly, as he himself once said, "the cabinet of his heart."

The experience of the preceding years had enabled the King to realize that party government, based exclusively on the majority in the Chamber of Representatives, limited the royal power. So long as the Unionist ministries lasted, the King had been truly the head of the Government. He was the guardian of the pact on which agreement within the cabinet was based, the arbiter of conflicts, the universal moderator. Observing the currents of public opinion, he threw the helm now a little toward the Left, now a little toward the Right. Owing to the lack of a united majority in the Chamber, the

existence of the ministry depended largely on the royal confidence.

With strictly partizan cabinets the situation was very different. The program and personnel of the ministry were imposed on the Crown in advance. The King could then exercise only a discreet resistance. Instead of steering the ship he could do no more than occasionally take in sail. His action was confined to the secrecy of the council, and if the council did not listen to him he must resign himself to relations of cold disagreement with his quasi-omnipotent ministers. He was exposed to blame from everybody, from those whom he restrained as well as from those whom he sought to protect. This situation weighed on Léopold. On occasion he spoke to his intimates of ditching everything and leaving the premises,[7] and as he wrote to Victoria, "I cast a sly look at my beautiful villa on the Lake of Como, *quite furnished.*" [8] But with this gesture of impatience the King bent once more to his task. He determined on his line of conduct, and, keeping to himself his reflections and his preferences, he adapted his method of government to the new circumstances.

Although Unionism had been considered by the Left, especially by its younger members, to be an outworn formula, it had on the Right numerous convinced supporters. At the formation of the de Brouckere cabinet the Catholics insisted that they did not claim power for themselves alone. In November, 1854, in the course of the discussion of the royal address, Count Félix de Merode refused to discuss in a general manner whether

[7] Cf. Queen Victoria's letter to the King on Dec. 21, 1852.
[8] Letter of Jan. 9, 1854.

or not the ministry should be supported. He did not ask it to be a perfect mirror of the majority. The ministers, whoever they might be, were in his eyes the ministers of the King. The latter, according to the Constitution, appointed and removed them. It would change the source of their power, and the Chamber would be absorbing the royal prerogative, if their selection were transferred to Parliament, which could only judge them by their acts. This extreme doctrine, little as it conformed to the theory of responsible ministry government, was highly regarded on the Right. At the very time when Lebeau in his famous letters was vigorously condemning mixed Governments, Pierre De Decker in 1852 brought out a striking brochure, "L'Esprit de parti et l'Esprit National," in which he maintained that Unionism was not a temporary expedient but a principle. The future minister wrote:

> Constitutional compromise between the parties should be the essential characteristic of our interior politics. To excite party spirit in the direction of exclusive domination is to invoke the principal danger which threatens our institutions; it is to push the tree in the direction in which it is leaning and risk upsetting it.

Parties, De Decker said further, ruin the Crown, which lives "crushed under their reiterated shocks, humiliated by their alternate triumphs. Proclaiming one principle to-day, another to-morrow . . . denying, disavowing, changing their minds every day"—such a régime "betrays the country to the advantage of its enemies."

De Decker vigorously combated the idea popularized by Devaux and Lebeau, that party government alone is consistent with the dignity of power. On the contrary,

party Governments, he declared, are inevitably the instruments of passion; they lead to incessant remaking of laws, to the sabotage of elections; they reject the advice of "wise adversaries" and put themselves at the service of "imprudent friends." As Tielemans wrote in 1831: "What we wish is that the Government shall hold itself aloof from all parties. Its governing principle must be the law; its duty, impartiality amid public dissensions; its right is to say to all, 'Respect the constitutional agreement.'"

De Decker then showed the danger of religious struggles in a Christian country where Catholicism is a distinctive feature of the national character; and he concluded with these words of generous idealism:

> What matter, after all, by whom we are governed, whether Catholics or Liberals, so long as we are governed in a spirit of prudence and moderation? What matter who holds the power, so long as the power be right in its intentions, great in its acts, and national in its policy, and guarantee to all citizens without discrimination the benefits of those constitutional liberties it is pledged to preserve? And so I do not ask for the Catholic group, to which I have the honor to belong, the possession of power; the guaranty of its liberty and its dignity solely concerns me.

And summing up these considerations in an appeal absolutely in accord with the well-known views of the King, De Decker wrote: "Liberals, you are not the whole country; Catholics, you are not the whole country; neither of you have the right to act by yourselves alone in the name of the country."

The ideas of De Decker, which inspired the program of the 1855 ministry, were noble, but they represented a singular misconception of realities. The parliamentary

régime is based essentially on the competition of programs and on the struggle of organized parties. Now, this cannot engender the most perfect harmony of hearts. To have prolonged its duration beyond 1839, Unionism would have had to have a philosophy of its own, and a series of solutions of educational and other problems. But because it failed to develop any original political thought characteristic of Unionism as distinguished from the parties who formed the Union, it remained nothing more than a sentimental tendency and an expedient. The Catholics, as we have already noted, had not gone deeply enough into natural law to find in a correct notion of the State the basic reasons for the practical tolerance they instinctively practised. The Liberals, on the other hand, even when not blinded by anti-religious passion, believed in lay supremacy, and were not disposed to let their adversaries enjoy the full benefit of their constitutional liberties. Unionism could have lived only if there had existed a strong current of opinion desirous of giving as much satisfaction as possible to both sides. The De Decker ministry, lacking this indispensable support, was nothing but a fortunate accident.

"Since I do not desire bitter party struggles, which are of the greatest disadvantage to us," wrote the King to Thiers on April 10, 1855, "I have succeeded in forming a Center-Right cabinet which is sympathetic with me and which will be able to function very well." [9]

The De Decker ministry was actually supported by a majority in the Chambers. It conducted Belgian diplomatic relations with vigilance and firmness and, to please

[9] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

France, put through a law punishing plots against foreign sovereigns. The principle it represented, however, was definitely eliminated from Belgian political life by the defeat of its bill on charitable foundations, introduced January 29, 1856.

But that intense crisis, which profoundly affected the evolution of parties, was preceded by a period of peace and calm. In the summer of 1856 the nation celebrated with a truly impressive consciousness of union and concord the twenty-fifth anniversary of the King's accession. Popular expressions of all sorts gave to Belgium itself and to Europe a clear idea of the strength of national feeling and the popularity of the King.

On July 21, 1856, Léopold I, on horseback, rode from Laeken to the Palace of Brussels through the magnificently decorated streets he had traversed twenty-five years earlier to take the oath as King. He was accompanied this time by the Princes of the dynasty he had founded, and the enthusiastic cheers that greeted him bespoke the pride and gratitude of the people whom he had faithfully served. On the steps of Saint-Jacques-sur-Coudenberg were grouped sixty-five of the survivors of the Congress. The King dismounted and, amid intense emotion, Baron de Gerlache, the ex-president of the Congress, rendered him perhaps the most striking homage that any monarch of the epoch ever received.

"Sire," he said, "it is twenty-five years since at this same place, on this same day, the Belgian Congress received, in the name of the people, your Majesty's oath to observe the Constitution and the laws of the Belgian people and to maintain the national independence. The men who were the witnesses of that solemn engagement

come to-day to affirm before Heaven that your Majesty has fulfilled all his promises and exceeded all our hopes. And the entire nation, sire, comes to affirm it with us. . . . It is here to attest that, during this reign of twenty-five years, its King has not violated a single one of its laws, or diminished a single one of its liberties, or given legitimate cause of complaint to a single one of its citizens. Here all dissensions disappear, here we are all in harmony, all our hearts have but one thought—to love both our King and our country."

De Gerlache then recalled the stability of which the Belgian institutions had already given proof, and praised the wise, able, and conciliatory Prince who presided over them. He evoked in moving terms "the great day of July, 1831, to which no enthusiasm could do justice, on which hearts, full of joy and hope, saluted in Léopold I the dawn of a new Belgium, awakened at last after two centuries of sleep under foreign domination." Speaking of the applause of the thousands before them, he said, "Yes, sire, it is the voice of the people, who feel the need of expressing their gratitude to him who, under God, has done most to make them happy."

The King replied by eulogizing the Congress, praising the firmness, wisdom, and "ability of that assembly, numerous as it was, which gave Europe a fine example—one, I dare to say, that has not often been followed." Shortly after, he received in a square of the new Quartier Léopold the homage of the public authorities and heard a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving. He recommended union to the Belgians as "the secret of our prosperity, of our grandeur, of our continued existence."

But it is less in the official speeches, inspired by the

ministers, than in the private letters of the King and in his less formal talks that his intimate thoughts are to be found. Léopold was deeply stirred by the jubilee. He more and more esteemed this Belgian people, difficult to manage in many ways but of unfaltering loyalty. As he said to Thiers: "It would be ungrateful on my part not to recognize that Heaven has protected us, and that our position is happy and honorable. May it continue thus! The country by its conduct on the whole deserves it." [10] He felt like a father among his children, and the comparison was often on his lips.

At Ghent, in a phrase very expressive coming from a man so reserved, he declared that the institutions confided to his care were on his part "the objects not of a political but of an affectionate solicitude." The trials borne together, the dangers of the past and of the present, the perils foreseen for the future, the attachment of the country to its King, to the dead Queen, to the Princes, to Princess Charlotte, had created singularly strong ties between the nation and its adopted chief. Léopold addressed on the day of the jubilee to his best fellow-workers letters which expressed his sincere feelings. To Lebeau, the man who had saved the Revolution from shipwreck, he recalled their arrival together at Brussels twenty-five years before. The King wrote:

> You had then by your ability and your courage taken a decisive part in the events which led to the foundation of the Kingdom of Belgium. If the country, since, has been happy and tranquil, if its prosperity and importance in Europe have been growing, you must feel a just satisfaction in looking back to the epoch when you had a hand in that historic work.

[10] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 319. Léopold I to Thiers, July 17, 1854.

To Nothomb, at his diplomatic post in Berlin, he sent these even more expressive lines:

> Your thoughts will revert to July 21, 1831. When one consults the "Moniteur" of that day, when one sees what was promised by the Crown and what it has performed, one cannot but feel great satisfaction. It is a fine sight to see a country grateful after so long a reign. I hope to remain its pilot, with God's help, and the future is full enough of clouds. Of all the Belgian statesmen, you are the one who has never despaired of the future, who has never changed sentiment, and who has given me evidence of the truest and most constant devotion, never obscured by the slightest cloud. I never forget things of that sort, and I love to remind you of them.[11]

During the summer months which followed the Brussels celebration the King and his children visited the nine provinces. Everywhere they were met with splendid manifestations of loyalty and affection. The King spent several days in each provincial capital. Processions, balls, banquets, visits to churches, public monuments, factories, and charitable institutions, brought him into contact with all classes of the population.

On July 27 he went to Bruges, the first important city that he had passed through in 1831. Responding to the address of the Provincial Council, the King praised the work accomplished with the help of all:

"We have established a solid national existence, assured at home and respected abroad. It is respected because it is worthy of respect, because it is based on principles and sentiments that every one honors and must honor, on morality and belief in sound social principles,

[11] Juste, *op. cit.*, pp. 603, 604.

on union of minds and hearts, on the sincere patriotism of the people."

Addressing the Communal Council, he congratulated the country on its devotion "to liberty without disorder, to legality without resistance." Careful to bring local feeling to the service of the national idea, he raised his glass in the course of the official banquet: "To the province which bears the good old name of Flanders!"

At Ghent he made a triumphal entry and spoke in the same vein. He recalled how much anxiety there had been in 1831 over his first visit to the citadel of Orangism and what a kindly reception had nevertheless been his. He spoke of the grievous experiences of that "ancient, noble, and powerful city, in the industrial crisis which followed the Revolution" and of his desire to develop "the vital forces of Flanders."

He showed a keen sense of Flemish psychology in his reply to an address of the Flemish societies:

"I could reply to you in Flemish, but it would be impossible for me to express myself as correctly as your secretary has done. I love the Flemish tongue; I love it very much, as I love all the Flemings. I write and read Flemish. Flemish and German having the same origin, the Flemish language is, so to speak, mine. I am pleased with the efforts that are being made for the development of Flemish literature and drama. I will do everything in my power to see that all Belgians, no matter what language they use, enjoy the same rights."

Léopold had taken care, indeed, to have his sons learn Flemish. In spite of Rogier's opposition, Henry Conscience was made "professor of the Princes" in 1847.[12]

[12] Papers of Viscount de Conway. Letter to the King, July 26, 1847.

The King saw to it that court favors were extended to the Flemish men of letters who were trying to free themselves from Dutch influence.

On August 3, the day after the Bruges celebration, the King went to Namur; he liked to speak of himself as an inhabitant of that province, where he spent a good deal of time throughout the year. As in the other cities, he received the authorities. He visited the Hospital of Harscamp and called on the Sisters of Notre-Dame. The next day he traversed by carriage the picturesque valley of the Meuse to his Château d'Ardenne. Each village gave him a reception which showed the spontaneity of the popular enthusiasm. The houses were decorated with flags and boughs; triumphal arches spanned the road; bells rang, and burgomasters, priests, and notables gathered to salute the royal family. After some days of repose on this favorite estate, the King and his children made a carriage journey through Luxemburg. Once more he was fêted at every stopping-place. Arlon offered him a solemn reception. Léopold took advantage of it to show how well he knew the country and its inhabitants. He praised the Luxembourgeois, their industry, initiative, and perseverance.

"The Luxembourgeois," said he, "undertakes, perseveres, and achieves." Not to arouse jealousy, he returned the long way round by Florenville and Bouillon to the Château de Vonèche.

On August 17, Antwerp in its turn gave the King a reception of gorgeous splendor. On August 24 and 25 he was the guest of Liége, where the popular demonstrations were of unequaled warmth. Early in September he went to Mons and visited many places in the neighborhood.

Since the time of Charles V, no such scenes had been witnessed throughout Belgium. Not a false note in this long series of festivities, not a mistake, not a clumsy gesture. The King, in all his steps, in all his words, was guided by the thought of making the Crown the visible center of the State, the incarnation of national spirit. The pomp of regal ceremonial, his personal kindliness and simplicity, struck the people. He charmed and won them. He, on his part, was rewarded for all his pains; he was delighted to feel loved. Praising Van de Weyer for his incessant efforts to make Belgium better understood in England, he sent him word September 17:

> I thank you with all my heart for the efforts that you are making for your deserving country. . . . The spectacle that Belgium offers is truly so instructive, so honorable in itself, and so useful to discreet monarchical governments, that too much public attention cannot be called to it.[13]

The celebrations of 1856 had, in fact, attracted considerable attention abroad. At a time when French ambitions were threatening Belgian independence, they were a proof of the unshakable loyalty of the country to the régime it had established. Old Stockmar, often Léopold's confidant in the difficulties surrounding the beginning of his reign, now in retirement at Coburg, wrote joyfully in his journal:

> I do not remember ever having seen, ever having heard *caeteris paribus,* of a triumph like this. Here is a recompense laboriously and painfully won, loyally and conscientiously deserved. If there is a part of the harvest which the victor does not yet enjoy, it will

[13] Juste, "Van de Weyer," Vol. II, p. 129.

ripen unfailingly in the future for his country and for his family.[14]

And the sagacious theorist of the constitutional régime saw in the splendors of the jubilee the success of the Belgian experiment which he had followed with anxious eyes since 1831—the planting of a dynasty, its adoption by the country, the happy interplay of those delicate institutions which require like wisdom in the sovereign and in the subject.

From this point of view the jubilee of Léopold I was an important event in the development of political science. A Louvain professor, M. Arendt, in a remarkable study first published in Germany, insisted on this point. He pointed out with a rare penetration the extraordinary difficulties of the task undertaken by Léopold. "The new royalty," he said, "had to remedy many mistakes which it had not committed, but to which it had fallen heir as the sorriest part of its heritage from the preceding reign." The régime established by William I had

given birth to a firmly rooted distrust not only of that monarch but—unjustly, it is true—of royalty itself. This distrust became a frequent obstacle in the path of the nation's new chief and could be dissipated only when his character had become better understood. Moreover, among a people monarchist by tradition, the satisfaction of a thousand contradictory demands was sought from the King without considering how parsimoniously the Constitution had meted out to him the means necessary to their satisfaction.

We must take into consideration also that the new royalty, by the mere fact of its recent origin, was deprived of all the advan-

[14] Saint-René Taillandier, "Léopold I^{er} et la Reine Victoria," Vol. II, p. 307.

tages that come to the aid of royal power even in the most perilous circumstances, either because it has been intimately tied up with the history of the people or because the sovereign can cast a retrospective glance over a long line of predecessors. All his ancestors who have shared the good and bad days of the nation have assisted in its political education and assured its greatness. But with us, of course, there could be none of those manifold bonds, none of that innate affection and natural confidence which unite an old dynasty with its people. For the creation of the sympathy so useful to other sovereigns in such critical positions, King Léopold had no means other than his own worth and the services which he could render the country.[15]

The King had foiled the bitter and perfidious attacks of the Orangists by utilizing with remarkable savoir-faire the good qualities of the Belgians. His personal talents had had a large part in this extraordinary success,

a profound acquaintance with the European point of view in all affairs, a keen knowledge of men and the principles that guide them, a clear and exact understanding of the most hopeless situations, a sureness of political perception that the best and most distinguished judges universally recognized in him and that excited in some of them more envy than admiration, a firm determination which did not bend to external facts or subordinate interests, patience in execution—in a word the fullness of the statesman's talents.[16]

All that the documents so far brought to light have revealed to us of Léopold's political methods justifies this contemporary judgment. The better we know his personal program, his ideas, his preferences, the more we must admire the tact that he displayed in the exercise of his powers.

[15] Arendt, "La Royauté en Belgique," in "La Belgique," 1856.
[16] *Id., ibid.*

Arendt says further:

> As soon as one of the two parties had become the legal majority, he always, without difficulty, without opposition, and without any reservation, furnished it the means of taking the Government in hand, and he left it in possession as long as it observed the constitutional conditions. . . . Each system of political thought was thus able to develop freely, for the Crown never put an obstacle in its path, never did anything which could shorten the duration of its power or arouse opposition to it.

This eulogy is all the more impressive now that we know that this strict observance of the Constitution did not prevent the King from having very definite personal opinions, or from making persistent efforts to rally to his views the men whom the majority had put in power. When one rereads his vast correspondence, when one measures the state of public opinion, when one evaluates all the material and psychological factors of his schemes, one must unhesitatingly ratify Stockmar's judgment of his royal friend as "the man who best knew the divine parts of the art of governing." [17]

[17] Saint-René Taillandier, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 324.

Chapter XIV

THE CRISIS OF 1857

When, in 1856, the De Decker ministry introduced its bill relating to charitable foundations, it was sincerely convinced that it had achieved a satisfactory compromise in that unsettled field. The Department of Justice had minutely studied the problem. Alphonse Nothomb, broad-minded and unprejudiced, had tried to satisfy the loud demands of the Catholics. The bill permitted charitable foundations of all sorts to be created and their administration to be confided to trustees, designated by the donor or testator. At the same time the government bill supplied ample guaranties against the abuses that were so greatly feared by the jurists and by the politicians of the Left.

All foundations were to be subject to royal authorization; the title to the property was to be vested in some *bureau de bienfaisance;* real estate not indispensable to the functioning of the foundation was to be sold. The one hundred and eight articles of the bill very minutely provided for the control of the foundations by the administrative authorities and the courts. The Minister of Justice was so anxious to give a Unionist character to the solution of this problem which had been bitterly debated for ten years, that he had the explanation of his bill drawn up by an old Liberal parliamentarian, d'El-

houngne,[1] who had sat with honor in the Congress. His notes and observations prove how intimately he had shared in the preparation of the measure. He also had been firmly resolved not to be affected by partizan considerations.

Unfortunately, passion was rife and the work of Nothomb was not discussed on its merits. It was attacked on the basis of its alleged tendencies. A running fire of pamphlets, articles, and addresses denounced the bill as an audacious reaction against the spirit of the times. It was intended to reëstablish the "dead hand"—to assure religious orders the material means of enslaving consciences and of permanently establishing their domination! It was going to drain the wealth of the country into the treasuries of the convents and erect a legal edifice which would subject modern Belgium to the power of the past! Frère-Orban, in particular, published under the title "La mainmorte et la charité," a virulent pamphlet which made a great sensation. By the time the debate opened in Parliament, April 21, 1857, the country was in a fever.

The entire Left, from the most moderate to the most radical, rallied in unanimous opposition. All the ex-ministers on the Liberal bench denounced the bill as an outrageous assassination of liberty. Now, a majority, no matter how interested in the public welfare, is omnipotent only in theory, above all when it comes to making laws in a field in which permanence is especially necessary. For a durable and fruitful result the legislature needs at least the tacit consent of the nation as a whole. The overexcite-

[1] Muller, "La querelle des fondations charitables," pp. 323 *et seq.*

ment of the public proved clearly that the problem was not ripe for solution. It was to be properly settled only after many years of serene academic discussion by jurists and philanthropists.

The laws of 1859 and 1864, reaffirming the views of the Liberal party, removed the problem from the realm of practical politics. Little by little men began again to study it calmly. For years it was discussed in the universities and other intellectual circles, until substantial agreement was arrived at. Then suddenly and almost without debate, the fine law of 1921 on non-profit corporations, in a form more in harmony with the modern spirit, put into effect the principles of the bill of 1857.

Nothomb was right too soon, and for a statesman that is to be wrong. Around his bill, as Guizot wrote, "it is no longer rights or ideas, it is fears that fight; the Liberals fear religion, the believers fear liberty. Neither have sufficient confidence in their cause and in its strength to allow freedom to their adversaries." [2]

Furthermore, the bill of 1857 had a serious defect in a country divided like Belgium. It would, in fact, have been of scarcely any use except to the Catholics, for there were then few if any non-Catholic charities to benefit by it. There is a natural distrust of anything which has the appearance of unduly favoring one section of the community. On the other hand, the law of 1921 is now generally recognized as obviously advantageous to all groups and parties.

The "law of the convents," as it was popularly called,

[2] Cf. Saint-René Taillandier, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

created excitement far outside the narrow circle of those who possessed the ballot. In popular gatherings the specter of the old régime was paraded in odious travesty. In the most serious Parliamentary circles fears scarcely less lively were expressed. Reading the discourses of Rogier, Lebeau, Frère-Orban, and other men of political experience, one is amazed at the dangers they discovered in a measure which differed little in principle from those in force in many other countries.

The character of Nothomb's adversaries indicates at the same time the violence of the antipathies aroused and the cabinet's lack of dexterity in adventuring on such a poorly prepared field. The debate in the Chamber was prolonged for twenty-seven days. In the meanwhile, urged on by the polemics of the press, the contagion of contention spread through the country. On May 27 the Chamber passed, by a vote of 60 to 41, articles 71 and 78 of the bill, which contained its essential provisions. But at that point the mob entered on the scene. Rioters surrounded the Palais de la Nation and hissed the members of the majority as they left. Crowds went about the city hooting the religious orders. An ecclesiastical establishment was looted at Jemappes. There was at least a threat of violence against the Government itself, and 1848 was not far enough away for these disorders, of little importance in themselves, not to cause real anxiety.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the maintenance of order in the cities was generally in the hands of communal magistrates hostile to the cabinet, and that the central Government, hampered by the law, had been rendered weaker still by a tradition opposed to central

authority which the Right itself had in the past certainly done its part to establish.

The Parliamentary Left cannot be accused of having deliberately appealed to the mob, but its bitter propaganda had put in motion forces it could not control. When the King was advised of the riot in the capital, perfunctorily repressed by the local police and the civic guard, he called the Council of Ministers together at the palace. Arriving in the evening from the Château of Laeken, cheered by the crowds that hooted the Government, he showed decided irritation. This attempt at outside pressure was a serious menace to the institutions over which he watched with vigilant solicitude.

The King proposed to the council the extraordinary step of declaring martial law. He had already called troops from the neighboring towns and from the camp of Beverloo to reënforce the garrison of the capital. The King, wrote Nothomb in describing proceedings at the palace, was in a violent rage at the instigators of the disorders. He called them by name.

"I will take horse if necessary to defend the representatives of the nation. I will not let the majority be outraged; I will crush these scoundrels." With indescribable voice and gesture he declared:

"It is the death of the parliamentary régime. You understand that, gentlemen, you understand that to-day, May twenty-eighth, the parliamentary régime has been closed. . . . The Constitution has been violated. I have kept my oath for twenty-six years; I have just been freed from it, let it not be forgotten. I can count, can I not, General, on the loyalty and devotion of the army?" [3]

[3] Muller, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

De Decker, generous and conciliatory in spirit, was not in favor of such vigorous action. He did not wish to resort to more severe police measures. The King concluded by announcing his intention of convoking the chiefs of the opposition the next day, "demanding of them moderation, respect for the Constitution and for the majority, and making them responsible for the consequences." But it seems that van Praet after the council had adjourned was successful in winning the King to a more moderate course.

The ministers met at noon the next day at the palace. As the agitation persisted and was increasing in intensity, Léopold proposed very judiciously to take from the bill Articles 69, 71, and 78, already voted, and pass them at once as a special law, so as not to feed the fire by prolonged debates. De Decker, at first opposed to this resolution, was converted to it. The ministers went to Parliament to negotiate with the leaders of the opposition. The new idea of an adjournment of Parliament was brought forward. The ministry, lacking a firm guiding hand, wavered at this decisive moment. De Decker had no wish to be the Guizot of the Belgian monarchy. On May 30 he backed down completely. In spite of the insistence of the King, he abandoned the idea of dividing the bill. The cabinet then decided to adjourn the Chambers. But the bill was dead.

The majority, in fact, was divided and overthrown by the timidity of the cabinet. Then Malou, acting in accord with the King, it seems, suggested, in a meeting of the Right, the withdrawal of the bill. There was, in fact, nothing else to do. The cabinet was resigned to it. On June 14 there appeared a report to the King announc-

ing this event, as well as a decree closing the session. At the same time the "Moniteur" published a letter from Léopold to the Prime Minister which was in fact a message to the nation. It must be read in its entirety to understand the part played by the King in meeting the crisis:

A long and animated discussion, followed by incidents which I deplore, has taken place in the Chamber of Representatives over a bill presented by you. For the first time in the twenty-six years that I have devoted to Belgium, a debate in Parliament has given birth to difficulties the solution of which has not been immediately apparent.

You have acted with the greatest loyalty and in entire good faith. You were firmly persuaded that the bill, if put into effect, would not produce the sad consequences that have been predicted for it. I will not express any opinion on the bill. I would never have consented to the introduction in our legislation of a law which would have the frightful effects feared from this; but without devoting myself to the consideration of the law itself, I am forced to take into account, as you do, the impression which on this occasion has been made on a considerable part of the population. There are in self-governing countries contagious emotions, which spread with a swiftness more easily noted than explained, and with which it is wiser to compromise than to reason.

The free institutions of Belgium have been working for twenty-six years with admirable regularity. What is needed, for them to continue to function in the future with the same order, with the same success? I do not hesitate to say that it is moderation and restraint in the parties. I believe that we must refrain from agitating any question which may ignite a war of minds. I am convinced that Belgium can live happy and respected if it follows paths of moderation. But I am equally convinced, and I publicly declare, that any measure which can be interpreted as tending to establish the supremacy of one opinion over another is dangerous. We do not lack liberty, and our Constitution, wisely and minutely carried out, presents a happy balance.

My sincere and profound devotion to the destiny of the coun-

try has led me to these grave reflections. I communicate them to the country, to you, to the majority of the representatives of the nation. . . .

In our present circumstances, the majority of the Chamber, whose desires as the majority are and must be my guide, has a noble position to take, a position worthy of a great party.

I advise it to give up, as you will propose, the further discussion of the law. It is to the majority that this generous rôle belongs. Whole-hearted acceptance of it will give the world a high notion of that party's wisdom and its patriotism. It will preserve in its ranks that strict union which is for all parties the first fruit and the first recompense of a fine and noble common action. Last year the country thanked me for my devotion. I thank it to-day for its confidence. . . .

The King's letter, a document without precedent in the history of constitutional monarchy, was received with a respect more eloquent than the acclamations of the jubilee year of the prestige Léopold had given the royal function. Those who most vigorously deplored the failure of the bill abstained from disputing his judgment. He had a double objective. On the one hand he sought to facilitate the majority's unavoidable retreat without detracting from the credit due them for initiating it. On the other hand, he meant to keep his ministry in spite of all the attacks of the opposition, and thus give the country time to calm down before the approaching communal elections in October.

All the terms of the royal message had been carefully weighed. The King had discussed them with van Praet and Conway. Note the categorical assertion, "I would never have consented to the introduction in our legislation of a law which would have the frightful effects feared from this"—a discreet protest against the exaggerations

of the adversaries of the project and an assertion of the Crown's right to participate freely in the work of legislation. Also note the phrase "the majority of the Chamber, whose desires as the majority are and must be my guide." The first draft of the royal letter said "must be my guide *and my law.*" Léopold, at the suggestion of Conway, struck out these last words with the idea that a revolutionary majority might assume to be a law to the sovereign, who always had in reserve the right to appeal to the electorate.[4]

From a distance, Stockmar had anxiously followed the development of the crisis. He observed it as a student of constitutional law, and he wrote to a correspondent:

> The letter of the King is a slightly irregular act, but a King who can rightly call himself the principal founder of a Constitution occupies for his life an exceptional position. The history of England under William III furnishes the proof of this assertion. King Léopold, *mutatis mutandis,* is to Belgium what William III was to England. That is why, in crises which touch the public safety, as the Belgian Constitution has not acquired the assurance and the consistency that only time and usage can give, the King may and even must, in support of its substance no less than its letter, exercise the royal authority in a manner which would no longer be suitable in a later epoch whose sentiment and judgment it would shock. Since the King's letter is published, it is useless to ask if it could have been better done. . . .[5]

Léopold very well understood that his conduct would be discussed in Belgium and abroad. It occurred to him, afterward, to consult Thiers and Guizot, the two persons who had acquired the most renown in handling affairs

[4] Papers of Viscount de Conway. Letter to the King, June 13, 1857.
[5] Saint-René Taillandier, *op. cit.,* Vol. II, p. 337.

under the constitutional régime in France. In a letter to Thiers, dated June 18, 1857, he expressed his basic thought, explaining the suddenness of the disorders in the capital and the measures taken to avert them. He wrote:

> The manifestations had as their object upsetting the cabinet and bringing about a dissolution of the Chambers in a moment of public madness, in such a manner as to kill the Conservative party on the spot. It was, then, a question of keeping the cabinet, for the Conservative party could not at that time furnish another, of saving the majority, of calming the public on the subject of an excessively unpopular law, and of maintaining order. Thank God, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the constitutional régime, this end has been attained without losing a drop of blood. The Liberal party remains under the just imputation of having substituted violence for law.

He adds these characteristic lines: "We had elections in 1856; we shall have them in 1858. It is impossible for the opinion of the country not to have its way, and violence is objectless or the result of culpable impatience." [6]

Thiers, in his reply, approved the conduct of the King. He praised him for having taken into account the popular excitement and for having avoided immediate elections. "As to Royalty," he said, "its art must be not to allow itself to be involved in the quarrel—to be moderator, never a party to the debate; above all, to take care never to be classed with one of the two parties." But with regard to the charitable foundations his sympathies were with the opposition rather than the majority.

Guizot embodied his reply in an article published the first of August in the "Revue des Deux Mondes." He

[6] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, pp. 329, 330.

analyzed the law and found it irreproachable. He condemned severely the attitude of the Liberals, but considering the circumstances he also approved the conduct of the King. He said:

> King Léopold has stopped the combat without recourse to arms, he has protected the peace of the troubled country by remaining in a position to appeal anew to the country, he has supported the measure without pushing it to ultimate conclusions—truly the conduct of a king, and a constitutional king.[7]

But from Léopold's point of view the most difficult task remained to be performed. Energetically criticizing the mob pressure, which had interfered with the regular progress of the Government, he desired to reach the elections without new incidents. "I hope," he wrote to Count de Buol on June 4, "to be able in a fitting way to extricate the majority from its bad position and I hope even to strengthen it." [8] To this end he strove to induce the Right to rally to the support of the cabinet instead of continuing to weaken it by reproaches and disparagement. Adolphe Dechamps went to Rome charged by the King with a confidential mission to the Pope. Léopold also consulted with the bishops, especially with the cardinal, with whom he found himself in agreement.

The King omitted nothing in the support of his ministers. He sought to strengthen their authority over the public officials. He demanded more energy from the governors of the provinces, even calling them to the palace and chiding them. Still hoping for a renewal of Unionism, he said to the ministers, on June 21:

[7] Saint-René Taillandier, *op. cit.*, p. 341.
[8] A. De Ridder, "Revue catholique des Actes et des Faits," 1927.

"You are indispensable, you are the shield of the moderate people of this country. I am glad to say this to you and you can count on me." [9]

Since the Left seemed to wish to give the coming communal elections a political significance, the King warned the Prime Minister.

"Remember," he said to him on October 18, at the conclusion of a meeting of the council, "that you have all my confidence." Turning back from the door of the room, the King leaned on the back of his chair, and spoke these words, which were taken down verbatim by one of those present: "Yes, remember that you are the ministry of my confidence and predilection. Remember that you are in the fortress, and that I am there with you and that no one can drive you out of it but yourselves."

The communal elections of October 27, however, showed notable Liberal gains. The ministry, disregarding the King's advice, broke up at once. De Decker, convinced that the majority in Parliament could be justly accused of not representing the country, resigned. Nothomb and Mercier, after having vainly combated this decision, also retired, but not without having defended their point of view in a public document. The Conservatives this time committed suicide.

The King wrote Thiers:

The determination of the cabinet was very irregular and must necessarily greatly embarrass the Crown. It was the cabinet's duty to stay in power until the regular elections in June, withdrawing the bill, of course, at the opening of the Chamber in

[9] Muller, *op. cit.*, p. 344. Account by Nothomb.

November. The result of its retirement can only be to bring about a Liberal cabinet.[10]

The King judged, in fact, that since the majority in the late cabinet had themselves cast suspicion on the title of the Right to power, he could not form another from that party. To the astonishment of many Conservatives, therefore, he called neither Nothomb nor Dechamps, but at once summoned Charles Rogier, to whom he granted a dissolution of the Chamber but not of the Senate.

In fact, Léopold was irritated by the pusillanimity of De Decker and his group. He felt almost as if the Crown had been betrayed.

"Your friends," said he one day, to a Catholic member of Parliament, "have many virtues, but in politics they lack the one which is worth all the others. Your friends lack . . . initiative. [The expression which the King used was much more forcible.] It was not I who abandoned them in 1857; it was they who abandoned me. I was ready to take horse; I would not have hesitated. They left me in the face of disorder; they forced me to yield to disorder, and no one can comprehend how deep was my humiliation." [11]

Notwithstanding what Discailles and Hymans have said, the King always considered that the title of the Left to assume the Government after the defeat of the charity bill was not entirely legitimate. "We are, then, back in the regular functioning of the régime," he wrote to Thiers after the elections of 1858, "and I hope that we shall stay there. But, to sum up, it is impossible not to see

[10] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 331. The King to Thiers, Feb. 18, 1858.
[11] Cf. "Revue générale," 1879, p. 626.

that if the parties in a truly free country do not respect the majority, the constitutional régime becomes impossible." [12]

The following year the King said to the same correspondent:

> Here we go along properly. But the irregularities of 1857 have extremely exasperated the Conservative party—which goes to prove, however, how completely constitutionalism has grown into our customs, for if the same things had been done in accordance with the rules, the Conservatives would have lamented but accepted them. I hope that those who have won will understand that a party ought not to push its success to the last extremity, and that it must not disgust a large fraction of our population with its political existence.[13]

In this crisis Léopold was not concerned with the subject of the debate itself. It was not the defeat of the charity bill that he deplored, it was the obvious disturbance it occasioned in the functioning of the régime. His political vision led him to understand better than any one else the sole conditions under which parliamentary government can subsist. If a party violates the rules of the game, if a group no longer respects the forms that limit political strife, if the opposition bursts out of the legislative halls into the street, the delicate mechanism of the Constitution is put out of gear. The veteran English politician, Lord Balfour, makes some general observations on this subject which agree absolutely with the views of Léopold. In the preface to the new edition of Bagehot's "English Constitution," Lord Balfour insists that the parliamentary régime and cabinet government can endure

[12] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 332.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 333.

only if popular instinct imposes on political struggles fixed rules and insuperable limits. Many years of experience have added but little to the theory which Léopold deduced on the spur of the moment from the facts confronting him.

The Catholics were offended with the King for turning so resolutely toward the Liberals after De Decker's resignation. Woeste, notably, echoed their reproach, and he hazards the explanation, unproved however, that the King was assured by the Left of the coöperation he sought on military matters. Others saw in what had happened evidence either of personal sympathy for the ideas of the opposition or of fear of further violence. It is known to-day that Léopold had entirely recovered from the distrust the Right had inspired in him at the beginning of his reign. "The King," wrote Stockmar, "has said to me many times: 'With us the Catholic party is the only one which offers a solid foundation; the Liberal party is a heap of sand. . . .'" This was somewhat disturbing to Stockmar, who was, for his part, a Liberal imbued with Protestant prejudices, and he hastened to add that the Catholic party existed solidly only because it was confronted with an intelligent and energetic minority which gave it cohesion by restraining it.[14] No more than at any other period of his reign, did Léopold obey in 1857 his personal sympathies. De Decker declared that he felt powerless to carry out his policy. He had lost most of his prestige on the Right; the Left would not accept his advances. In such circumstances a cabinet more definitely Catholic than that of 1855 was

[14] Saint-René Taillandier, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 335.

not within the range of possibility. It is thus possible to understand Léopold's summoning the Left to power, although in his secret soul he blamed them for the whole affair.

Chapter XV

FOREIGN POLICY

We have shown in the first chapters of this work the decisive part Léopold took in the long and difficult negotiations that ended in the treaties of 1839. Up to that time he was constantly absorbed in diplomatic labors imposed upon him by the precarious situation of his kingdom. To free Belgium from the too marked influence of France while maintaining the most cordial relations with the July Monarchy, to soothe Russia, Austria, and Prussia, to defend the Revolution against the intrigues of William of Holland, to get a foothold in the Europe of the Congress of Vienna as the spokesman of an independent and sovereign nation—such had been the principal objectives of the King.

The peace signed with the Netherlands had closed this first phase of his reign. The country at last enjoyed an undisputed international status, and although Léopold had suffered a mortifying defeat in the loss of Limburg and Luxemburg, he had none the less accomplished, in the eight years of effort, more than he would have dared to promise in the gloomy days of 1831.

His personal position was important. He had succeeded in establishing his throne firmly among a people who had been thought ungovernable. Son-in-law of the King of the French, uncle and intimate adviser of the Queen

of England and the Prince Consort, uncle of the King of Portugal, related to the ruling houses of Germany, he had entered into direct personal relations with all the statesmen of the Continent. Who was better situated than he to enact the rôle of benevolent observer and unofficial intermediary? The Kingdom of Belgium, set up as a perpetually neutral State to meet the exigencies of the European balance of power, had an importance out of proportion to its area and population. Léopold's calm ambition led him to grasp fully what indirect power thus came to him. He found therein an antidote for the trifling annoyances of his profession as a constitutional monarch and for the disappointments life had meted out to him.

Politics, with its demands for observation, calculation, and foresight, was for him a veritable intellectual game. But deeper than this was an altruism based on his Lutheran faith. He liked to say that he served humanity *pro Deo*. He was ambitious to exercise great influence, to increase the renown of his house, to make a private fortune, but he was none the less devoted to an idea which singularly ennobled his life. Léopold was a convinced and indefatigable servant of peace. He had witnessed the devastation that the French Revolution had caused in Europe. He had been decorated on the field of battle for his bravery under fire, and he did not wish to see again what his eyes had seen. It might be said of him as Guizot said of Louis-Philippe:

> The iniquities and the sufferings that war inflicts on men, often for such light motives or for such vain schemes, revolted his humanity and his good sense. Among the great social hopes —I will not say the prettiest dreams—with which his time and training had beguiled his youth, that of peace had impressed him

more than any other and remained a powerful influence upon his soul. It was in his eyes the true victory of civilization, a duty for man and King. He made the fulfilment of this duty his pleasure and his honor more than he sought in it his safety.[1]

Léopold, in his prime, loved peace for its own sake. He devoted himself to it, actuated by reason and by a sense of duty. The revolutionary period had inflicted on his family and on himself many tribulations. He had noted, in Germany, France, and even England, how profoundly the social order was shaken by the rude blows of the beginning of the century. He was convinced—and it is an idea that recurs a hundred times in his correspondence—that any war whatever might again open the dike to the torrent, and that no one could foresee how far its fury would reach. He never tired of urging this conviction upon the reactionary Austrians, whose tragic blindness he seems to have fathomed. He pointed it out to Thiers in the days of Louis-Philippe, to Napoleon III long before the Commune. He spoke of it, also, to the English, to the Italians.

His conservative instinct was strengthened by his well-developed business sense. He paid close attention to the economic progress and financial prosperity of his country. Belgian interests, in short, made him the consistent enemy of any warlike policy. He knew too well how precariously his throne was balanced. He considered it his duty, therefore, to make every effort to prevent conflicts between the powers, and to keep dissensions from growing worse once they arose. In his eyes any war, near or far, just or unjust, was a danger to Belgium, and he could

[1] Guizot, "Mémoires," Vol. II, p. 259.

not but be interested. He wrote to Victoria on January 9, 1854, fortifying himself with a phrase of Wellington's:

> The dear old Duke used to say, "You cannot have a little war." The great politicians of the Press think differently. The Duke told me also once: "At the place where you are, you will always have the power to force people to go to war." I have used that power to *avoid* complications, and I still think, blessed are the peacemakers.

The Belgian question was not yet completely settled when in a distant part of the world there arose a grave situation pregnant with explosive potentialities. The Turco-Egyptian dispute brought France and England, who had united in support of Belgium at the time of the Revolution, into conflict. France backed Mehemet Ali against his suzerain at Constantinople and claimed for him not only Egypt, where she hoped to implant her influence, but also Syria. The other powers looked at the matter very differently. To checkmate France in the Near East they signed the treaty of July 15, 1840, which settled, without her consent, the whole question of the Levant. Mehemet Ali was called upon to abandon his conquests. Feeling himself supported by Paris, the Pasha resisted. The appearance of an allied fleet off the coast of Asia Minor brought on a revolt in Syria against the Egyptian conqueror. The tension became very great and the French cabinet, presided over by Thiers, let itself be carried along by the war current to the point of talking of a direct thrust on the Rhine as a reply to the veto pronounced on the near-Eastern plans of France. For a while it was uncertain whether Louis-Philippe would be strong enough to prevent the explosion of chauvinistic passion.

Belgium was in almost as much danger from this distant dispute as she had been during the crisis of 1839. A rupture between France and England would inevitably have brought about her ruin. The prospect of a European war seemed so imminent that the Government undertook to define in advance what its conduct would be in that event. Lebeau, who once more held the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, made known in all the capitals that Belgium expected to abide strictly by the engagements contracted in 1831 with the Conference of London, and that she would neglect nothing to make her neutrality respected. The right and the duty of the country to take all the military measures necessary to assure the inviolability of its frontiers was forcefully asserted despite the distrust shown by Prussia and the doubts expressed, singularly enough, by Palmerston. A diplomatic circular dated April 4, 1840, established a precedent which until 1914 was followed whenever the peace of Europe seemed to be in danger. At the opening of Parliament on November 10, the King uttered these significant words, which happily defined the foreign policy of Belgium as he envisaged it throughout his reign:

"Neutrality is most certainly the true basis of our policy; to maintain it sincerely, loyally, and effectively must be our constant aim."

This meant no leaning toward one or the other group of powers, no exclusive alliance, but unshakable fidelity to the "pentarchy" which gave its common guaranty to the independence of the country. Energetic and courageous preparation for war, of course, was necessary to support his attitude.

This was as far as Belgium went officially, but the

solicitude of the King was not limited to the solemn assertion of the policy. It was desirable, if possible, to avert the dreaded danger. On his own initiative, acting secretly and quite outside of his sphere as King of the Belgians, Léopold intervened in the discussions of the powers. Mysterious couriers—for he mistrusted the post—hurried to the great capitals, carrying his mollifying suggestions. Under divers pretexts he went personally to Paris, London, and Wiesbaden. Even the department of Foreign Affairs was not in touch with the secret activities of the King, who did not disdain the amusing title of *avocat consultant du Gotha.*

He had few confidants in these subtle maneuvers on the margin of official diplomacy: van Praet, his private secretary, Viscount de Conway, the Controller of the Civil List, and occasionally Van de Weyer and Nothomb, were the only Belgians in whom he confided. Paradoxically, it was the King who, with sure sources of information in the highest spheres of international politics, told his Minister of Foreign Affairs what he judged it useful to let him know. International politics thus became more and more the province of the King, and the Rue de la Loi [2] showed no embarrassment in directing to the palace foreign diplomats not yet aware of this situation. Count de Woyna, Austrian minister at Brussels, commented humorously on this fact in a letter written to his Government in 1848:

> Every foreign diplomat, every representative of a foreign court at Brussels, as soon as he has had time to get his bearings here

[2] Rue de la Loi: the street on which the Chamber of Representatives and important government offices, including the Foreign Office, are located.—*Translators.*

. . . instead of addressing himself to some member of the ministry, will infallibly be led to do everything within his power to get as close as possible to the King. In fact, the essential thing for the head of a legation is to put himself in a position where he can learn either directly or through M. van Praet, minister of the royal household, the ideas and wishes of his Majesty on all things, before inquiring, as a mere matter of form, into the views of his ministers.[3]

There is obviously some exaggeration in this statement, for in matters of Belgian policy Léopold could not do without the coöperation of the cabinet of the moment, but the picture is exact enough as far as it relates to questions of general European interest.

Permanent neutrality obliged the country to keep out of international conflicts and imposed great reserve on its official spokesmen. It did not, in Léopold's opinion, prohibit the Chief of State from doing everything in his power to lessen the chances of a catastrophe. The Turco-Egyptian affair and the Spanish marriages are cases in point.

Belgium could take no part in these disturbing affairs—the King knew it and proclaimed it—but the very impartiality of her position drove him to act instead of shutting himself up in that passivity which, after him, became the governing principle of Belgian diplomacy. To avoid a general war it was first necessary to make the other countries realize the imperious necessity of calming the dangerously excited public opinion of France. Léopold, who had personal contacts in both camps, here showed the superiority of his mind. He was too modern,

[3] A. De Ridder, "Un diplomate autrichien à Bruxelles," in the "Bulletin de la Commission royale d'Histoire," 1925, p. 134.

had seen too much and lived too much to believe that nations can be handled like pawns on a chess-board, without regard to their human elements and the passions which animate them. English in his ideas, he nevertheless understood France and estimated at their true value the popular forces seething there. Palmerston had been harsh and curt, he had treated that proud but sorely disillusioned people inconsiderately. "But Palmerston *likes to put his foot on their necks! Now, no statesman must triumph over an enemy that is not quite dead,* because people forget a real loss, a real misfortune, but they won't forget *an insult.*" [4]

The King of the Belgians made a last appeal to Metternich and the press to help him at London. "For fifty years," he wrote the Chancellor, "the evils that have been loosed in Europe have originated in France"; it was important, then, not to ignite "this mass of inflammable materials." He wrote from Laeken on March 21, 1840:

> A tolerable understanding between France and England means peace, a breach means war. Hitherto, all the gain has been on the side of England. France was not suffered to annex anything. One cannot say that this pleased the ardent section of the French nation. . . . Up to the present things have gone quietly, but it would be a mistake to think that *French vanity can be wounded indefinitely with impunity. Un beau matin* we shall see something that we shall not like. It will then be too late, and no one can tell *what mischief will be done.*[5]

Léopold was not satisfied with writing. He went to Paris; he saw the French leaders, he caught the echoes of their fear and wrath, he tried to make them listen to

[4] Leopold I to Victoria, Oct. 2, 1840.
[5] Corti, *op. cit.,* pp. 124, 125.

reason, he proposed the grounds for an honorable compromise. In his opinion, the very object of the dispute was absurd and the enthusiasm manifested in France for Mehemet Ali, an adventurer who might disappear any day in a palace revolution, was entirely misplaced. But as a realist he saw things as they were, not as he would have liked them to be. He wrote to Metternich a little later:

> Do not imagine that this outburst of public opinion in France is mere bravado. There is an element of bravado in it, but there is also a large and dangerous truth in it, and it is urgently necessary to reunite France with the four other Powers.[6]

With a clairvoyance which future events did not belie, the King once more warned the Austrian Chancellor against any warlike step:

> . . . Quite trivial things . . . might bring on a great war, which would turn into a war of opinions. To confine it to Mehemed would be impossible. I do not say it in order to strengthen my own proposals, but, as far as I know Europe, I believe that its entire social form and organisation would be transformed and shattered by such a struggle.[7]

Léopold then visited London, where he made similar pacific efforts. Discreet negotiations were brought about by his intermediation. Returning to Belgium, he corresponded regularly with Victoria, with Palmerston, with Thiers. He forwarded to the court of England agonized letters from Louis-Philippe. The outline of an agreement leaving Egypt to Mehemet Ali and Syria to the Sultan was drawn up. Léopold insisted that nothing be done

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

further to destroy the popularity of his father-in-law, whose seat on the throne he perceived to be precarious. When Louis-Philippe, to safeguard peace, had courageously forced the resignation of Thiers, Léopold left no stone unturned to have the Eastern question as a whole settled amicably by the six great powers. He frankly admitted that if Guizot's situation were rendered untenable, Louis-Philippe would be completely overwhelmed.

The affair was finally settled in 1841. The King of the Belgians performed well his obscure and thankless task as intermediary and conciliator, a task which required a complete understanding of the problem, dexterity, tact, and a clear sense of European concerns. The rôle he assumed was exactly that which Belgian interests demanded. No one but Léopold could have filled it. Necessity called for this enlargement of the royal function and this discreet complement to the policy of neutrality.

Léopold's methods in the matter were quite natural to him. Baron Nothomb, next to van Praet the person best qualified to judge of the immense secret labors of the King, wrote:

> He was his own minister of Foreign Affairs. He corresponded with every influential personage, chiefs of state and chiefs of cabinet, and nothing of importance was done in Europe of which he was not informed, nothing serious developed that he was not able to foresee. None of his official ministers could have commanded such a position. . . . In a sense the department of Foreign Affairs is the brain of every Government, it is its Providence, it watches the signs of the times, it seeks to discover the relations, sometimes distant, between the destiny of the country and outside events. . . . Belgium is less able than any other State to isolate herself. Her very existence is dependent upon the general system. The chief of her diplomacy, king or minister, must be an almost

universal observer, with his eyes always on the map of the world; no movement, especially in Europe, must escape him. It was thus that King Léopold I understood this function which, although hidden from the common herd, demands continued vigilance. He will remain the ideal Belgian diplomat.[8]

If the country was not to be a mere plaything of events, it was essential that its will to live should be materialized in a respectable military force. It is because of its army that a State fully merits the expressive name of "power" which the language of the law of nations gives it. Its capacity for resistance makes it a passive or an active element in international politics. The ministry of 1841 well understood this when it proclaimed a loyal and resolute neutrality. The King, too, vigorously combated the discouragement which followed the signing of the treaties of 1839. He wished to reduce the number of men under arms and cut down military expenses, but he did not wish to go too far in that direction. He continued to exercise direct personal control over the army as the essential instrument of the State's policy. He feared for a defenseless Belgium the consequences of a *fait accompli*, against which she would revolt in vain. He never ceased, therefore, warning the politicians against the easy temptations of antimilitarism. The crisis of 1848 sufficiently justified his fears. "The least invasion of the country by foreign forces," he wrote to Lebeau in 1850, "would cost it hundreds of millions; but what is more important, it might cost it its political existence." [9]

The King, in fact, had on this point a theory based on experience. He wrote to Rogier about that time:

[8] Baron Nothomb, *op. cit.*, p. XII.
[9] Cf. Juste, "Léopold I^er^," p. 260.

Belgium, by her geographical position, is the most exposed country in the world. Where other countries have months to prepare themselves, she has days. . . . Belgium can be inundated, but if she does not surrender in advance she has very good chances of resistance and even of subsequent advantages; if invaded and occupied, she would have to bear the enormous and ruinous exactions of both enemies and friends; and, I must add, they would be well deserved if they were the result of her own blindness. . . . I have never made the army, as has been done in many other countries, a personal amusement, notwithstanding the lively interest that military affairs inspire in me; but I see in it, as M. Thiers said to me a few months ago, the independence of Belgium; without adequate means of defense you will be everybody's plaything.[10]

And on January 21, 1851, Léopold, when requesting the premier to provide for the interim administration of the War Office, repeated to him:

"Without national security, there is no political existence; all our most precious interests, without exception, are concerned in this security."

He trembled for fear the instrument which permitted him to act effectively in the diplomatic field would be snatched from his hands, for if it had been known that Belgium was at the mercy of a surprise attack it would have been a waste of paper and ink to plead her cause in the great capitals.

Léopold began his reign with a policy toward France which suffered no fundamental change. He knew that the independence of Belgium, to be lasting, must be real and unmistakable. His election to the throne had been a guaranty to the powers against the francophile tendencies then attributed to the Belgian Revolution. The King,

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

therefore, carefully avoided all appearance of being influenced by Paris. In his correspondence with Austrian and German statesmen he always insisted on this point, not hesitating to show his mistrust of the radical parties and of their doctrine of natural frontiers. But at the same time he wanted to maintain relations of sincere friendship with France. The hostility of the German States forced him into closer relations with the July Monarchy; he appreciated, moreover, the wise moderation of Louis-Philippe, whom he recognized as a natural ally.

Determined to fulfil in their entirety the international obligations involved in the neutrality imposed on Belgium, Léopold was conscious of the fact that the independence of his kingdom was very much to the advantage of its neighbor to the south. From this point of view he was the creditor, and dared to say so. In 1836, in a discussion of the tariff on coal, he insisted to Thiers that France should not in these commercial negotiations lose sight of the political situation and cast Belgium into the arms of the Germans. The King wrote:

> I know full well that in the Chamber of Deputies there are many practical men who take little interest in foreign policy. But a country which protects the frontiers of France from the North Sea to the Moselle, as Belgium does, is of too great importance to your most vital interests not to be entitled to special kindness.[11]

This idea, which crops up more than once in Léopold's correspondence with French statesmen, clearly indicates the basic principle which he impressed on Belgian policy. We find it again, diluted with foreign-office phraseology, in the instructions sent in 1842 to the Prince de

[11] Lansac de Laborie, "Correspondances du siècle dernier," p. 238.

Ligne, just appointed Ambassador to France. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count de Briey, wrote:

> Independent Belgium, called by its geographic position and the treaties to serve, if one can thus express it, as intermediary between two great nationalities, offers France guaranties of a peculiar nature. She protects with her neutrality the nearest frontiers of France, and our powerful neighbors will have on that account to concern themselves much less, in case of war, with the defense of this part of their territory, otherwise the most exposed and in certain respects the most vulnerable. That is a result of great importance to France—so to speak, a material result strengthened and developed by the sentimental ties which unite the two peoples. . . . This sympathy which naturally draws the two countries together assures France a certain, constant, and devoted ally. While emphasizing the divers points of contact existing between the two nations, the Prince de Ligne will nevertheless take care not to give the impression that the one considers itself a vassal or an annex of the other. He will recall that Belgium is devoted to her new neutrality. Everything which appears of a nature to affect it adversely concerns her deeply and excites her anxiety.[12]

In his desire to restore the economic prosperity of the country, to which the loss of the Dutch market had been a very severe blow, Léopold had thought at one time of establishing a customs union with France. On May 21, 1840, in a letter to Thiers, he outlined the plan.[13] The King wanted the thing, but if possible without the name —as he had already, February 1, 1840, written to Lehon[14]—for strong objections on political grounds were to be expected from the other powers. They were, in fact, expressed in the clearest fashion, particularly by England.

[12] Princesse Ch. de Ligne, "Souvenirs de la Princesse de Ligne," p. 220.
[13] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 256.
[14] Juste, "Le comte Lehon," p. 183.

Men like Lebeau and Nothomb, moreover, would never have supported the King in such a risky scheme. It is not surprising, therefore, that he soon changed his mind. Sometime in November he so informed the Belgian minister at Paris:

> You know that our people are excessively susceptible and still have unhappy memories of vexations under the Empire, as well as of the unpopular taxes of King William. After a very conscientious examination we have arrived at the conclusion, which I have already expressed to you at Paris, that it is absolutely necessary to give the treaty a purely commercial character.[15]

And a few weeks later he wrote to the same correspondent:

> A customs boundary between the two countries is necessary; the rest of Europe needs a palpable proof that the two countries are not being merged. The four signatory powers of our treaty have already pronounced themselves against a customs union; they declare that such a union would put an end to the position which the treaty assures us, that our neutrality would cease in fact and in law, that we should be nothing but a French province which the powers would no longer respect. In this country, where the importance of neutrality is beginning to be understood, its maintenance is desired, and the majority would oppose with all their strength any measure which would detract from it.[16]

Thenceforth Belgian policy on this point was settled. In 1842 the Prince de Ligne received formal instructions to reject any idea of a customs union.[17]

The commercial negotiations, however, continued to have the King's personal attention. In his correspondence

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 202.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 203.
[17] Cf. Princesse de Ligne, *op. cit.*, pp. 230 *et seq.*

with his ministers he discussed the details of the parleys relative to wool and coal; he sent confidential agents to Paris; he negotiated personally with Louis-Philippe and the French Government, revealing a keen understanding of economic problems. His activities unified the political and commercial points of view of the Belgian Government. He wrote on October 29, 1845, to Adolphe Dechamps:

> If anything can influence M. Guizot, it is certainly not a rupture with Belgium as a country, for they know in Paris exactly what we could and could not do, but the continuance of the support which I have always given him in the international politics of Europe, a support on which he has always been able to count when his policy has been conformable to the great and true interests of Europe.[18]

The commercial treaty of December 13, 1845, was thus in a large measure the work of Léopold, who had prepared the field and inspired and supported the Belgian negotiators.

The fall of the July Monarchy profoundly modified Franco-Belgian relations. The accession of the second Bonaparte meant that the great nation was tired of the discreet but unadventurous policy of the Citizen King. Imperialists resumed the direction of foreign affairs. They were forced to seek the revision of the treaties of 1815—consequences of Waterloo—which Louis-Philippe had accepted as accomplished facts. The Prince-President, soon Emperor, in spite of ephemeral intentions or solemn declarations, could not sincerely carry on the policy of the fallen Government. Napoleon III had to dis-

[18] Juste, *op. cit.*, p. 583.

tract a bored France; he had to fire the imagination of his electorate.

The Bonapartist régime and Belgium had difficulty in establishing satisfactory relations, for sincerity was lacking on the one hand and confidence on the other. The guiding principles of the two Governments were necessarily opposed. The Empire was a victim of its traditions of expansion and grandeur. Liberal, parliamentary Belgium was the living antithesis of Napoleonic Cæsarism, and all the adversaries of the coup d'état of December 2 did her the ill service of praising her institutions to the skies. The presence of numerous French political refugees in Belgium increased the friction—the more so because the action of the Belgian police was hesitant and uncertain. The ties of kinship between the Belgian royal family and the house of Orléans were, too, a source of suspicion and difficulty.

The King of the Belgians, who had cut a figure in Paris in the time of his father-in-law, could not enjoy the same importance there under the Empire. The Prince-President, moreover, by the confiscation in January, 1852, of the property of the house of Orléans, had cheated the royal family of Belgium out of thirty million francs, a situation which, naturally, did not make for good feeling between the two courts.

French historians favorable to the second Empire, notably Emile Ollivier, have bitterly denounced Léopold I as a sworn enemy of France, incessantly intriguing against the Emperor in all the capitals. They have failed, on the other hand, to disclose the policy of the latter toward Belgium. What were on the King's part measures of precaution and self-defense thus assume the appearance

of startling acts of aggression. But a careful examination of the diplomatic correspondence of the epoch gives the lie to this audacious reversal of the rôles of the two sovereigns.

The King of the Belgians had not looked unkindly on the election of Louis-Napoleon to the presidency, because the reëstablishment of order in France seemed to him of the first importance. "From the point of view of political security, threatened in its most precious interests," he wrote Thiers after December 28, 1848, "it is a victory which can only do good." [19] But the personality of the new French Chief of State and the prospect of the reëstablishment of the Empire naturally worried him. After the coup d'état of December 2, 1851, fear was uppermost in his mind. He wrote to his niece on December 19:

> A military Government in France, if it really gets established, must become dangerous for Europe. I hope that at least at its beginning it will have enough to do in France, and that we may get time to prepare. England will do well not to fall asleep, but to keep up its old energy and courage.

Convinced of the danger to the independence of Belgium, he strove to have confirmed by all possible means the guaranty of the neutrality of his kingdom. It is a strange interpretation of the activities of the King to find in this very understandable anxiety a proof of aggressive sentiments. Léopold sought, as he said at Schwartzenberg on February 12, 1852, "a strict union between the Continental powers, not for attack but against any attack." Always an advocate of peace, more convinced than ever, since the latest revolutionary explosion, of the danger to

[19] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

the social order of any warlike policy, the King never dreamed of provoking armed intervention against France. In France, as everywhere, he boldly accepted the accomplished fact. Why impute to him as a crime the wish to reduce to the minimum the risk of an upset from which his kingdom would be the first to suffer?

The new French régime, moreover, immediately showed itself to be a bad neighbor to Belgium. After 1852 the French press, under the strict surveillance of the Government and obedient to its suggestions, resounded with bitter attacks upon Belgium. The freedom of the press in Belgium permitted the refugee adversaries of the Prince-President to conduct with impunity a virulent campaign against the Government which had exiled them. The de Brouckere cabinet, however, put through, shortly after the reëstablishment of the Empire, a law punishing offenses against foreign sovereigns.

In 1853 the situation was further strained. Commercial relations had suffered as a result of political differences. France, too, showed some dissatisfaction with the measures of defense taken by Belgium. In March, in connection with the Eastern question, the French minister at Brussels made the disturbing declaration that the first shot fired would restore to France "all her liberty of action." In her eyes the European balance would have ceased to exist. Belgium seemed to be regarded as a hostage the ultimate settlement of whose lot the Emperor reserved to himself. In 1856 he charged Belgium at the bar of the Congress of Paris with being guilty, because of its liberal legislation, of keeping European public opinion in a state of turmoil.

The real purpose of Napoleon III with regard to Bel-

gium can no longer be disputed. He meant one day or another to incorporate her in the Empire. In his vast schemes for the refashioning of Europe, Belgium, as M. Bainville remarks, represented neither a nationality nor a race; "it was but a nation, and in consequence, according to his doctrine, it did not count." [20] The draft of the treaty which Benedetti by order of his Government submitted to Bismarck in 1866 proves that the conquest of Belgium was Napoleon's secret object. It is now known that this audacious attempt, long imputed to the unrest caused by the Prussian victory of Sadowa (Königgrätz), was not the first.

Léopold, then, had every reason to be afraid. His apprehensions had originally been founded on reasoning and observation, but formal proofs of the conspiracy against Belgium fell into his hands later. In 1863, Jules Devaux wrote confidentially to Baron Beyens that he had before him an exact analysis, almost a copy, of a note from France to Austria, proposing a remodeling of the map of Europe by which France and Holland were to share Belgium. "The idea is that a coalition of France, Austria, and Prussia should impose their wills on impotent England and intimidated Russia. The Belgian royal family would have been indemnified by a throne in Poland or on the Rhine. . . . This was the idea at the back of Napoleon's head." [21]

In the light of these facts can one find fault with Léopold for understanding Napoleon III better than others, and for refusing to throw himself into his arms? Toward

[20] Jacques Bainville, "Histoire de Trois générations," p. 166.
[21] Baron Beyens, "Le second Empire vu par un diplomate belge," Vol. I, p. 338.

the Empire, then, he adopted the sole reasonable attitude —constant diplomatic vigilance to assure threatened Belgium of the coöperation it might need, military vigilance so that the conspirators might never think of the conquest of Belgium as a riskless excursion.

The Belgian Government, conscious of its weakness, went far in satisfying the demands of Napoleon III concerning the press and the refugees. The King even made special efforts not to irritate his powerful neighbor. The marriage of the Duke of Brabant with an Austrian archduchess greatly displeased the Emperor. In September, 1853, therefore, Léopold sent the Prince de Chimay, a near relative of the imperial family, to serve as the liaison between the two courts. In the greatest secrecy he also lent his good offices to the negotiations for a marriage between Prince Napoleon and the daughter of the Duke of Cambridge, and the Emperor recognized the goodwill Léopold displayed in falling in with his imperial desires.[22]

"M. l'Ambassadeur," the King said to Count Waleski after having worked in London for the success of the scheme, "I hope that my sojourn will have been useful in consolidating and tightening the alliance of the two great nations. I have done all I could in this respect. . . ."

Early in 1854, Léopold I received Prince Napoleon at the Palace of Brussels, although the litigation relative to the confiscation of his children's property was not going at all well. In February, 1854, he bestowed upon the Emperor the Grand Cordon of the Order of Léopold;

[22] Cf. A. De Ridder et F. Lorent, "Une mission diplomatique et matrimoniale du Prince de Chimay," in the "Revue générale," Aug. 15, 1926.

in September of the same year, despite the protests of de Brouckere and at the risk of irritating Russia, then at war with France, he went to pay a visit to Napoleon at Calais. Some months later he sent the Duke of Brabant and his young wife to Saint-Cloud.

But although these steps, obviously painful to the *amour propre* of the royal house, evidence Léopold's determination to neglect nothing in the maintenance of correct relations with the Emperor, they did not at all signify any yielding to the French policy. Léopold remained invariably conservative and pacific. He could not consent to have Belgian neutrality transformed into what the Emperor wanted, "an intimate union with France." Such was the expression Napoleon III employed in 1859, as the King reported it to the English Prince Consort.[23] For the same reasons he could not applaud the Crimean War, which in 1854 involved three of the guarantors of Belgian neutrality. Nor could he rejoice in the Italian war and the defeat of Austria. In the efforts which the King made to prevent these struggles or to shorten their duration, there is no evidence of a will to harm France. He wished only to restrain her.

Although he feared that the Franco-British alliance might deprive England of her freedom of action, he did not make it an excuse for sowing dissension between London and Paris. The intimate and spontaneous correspondence of the King with Victoria is proof of this. Léopold did not hide from his niece how much uneasiness the policy of Napoleon gave him. On January 13, 1854, he wrote:

[23] Martin, "Life of Prince Consort," Vol. IV, p. 355.

I hold a position of great geographical importance for England, just opposite the mouth of the Thames. Successes of vanity I am never fishing for in England, nor anywhere else. The only influence I may exercise is to prevent mischief where I can, which occasionally succeeds. . . . The foolish accusation that we are doing all we can to break up the French Alliance is certainly the *most absurd of all;* if anything can be for our local advantage, it is to see England and France closely allied, and for a long period—for ever I should say. . . .

Decidedly, in the eyes of the King, this was a principle of Belgian policy, and a shift from Orleanist to Bonapartist control in France could make no change in what cold reason dictated to him. The Austrian Minister to Brussels verified this fact in 1861, writing:

The essential thing for King Léopold, is, in my judgment, the continuance of the Franco-British alliance. It is there that he finds the surest guaranty for the independence of Belgium; for England, whatever be its ministry, will never be able to consent to the annexation of Belgium to France, even if French intrigues should be so successful as to bring to pass a unanimous Belgian plebiscite in favor of the union with France.[24]

But the Emperor—and there he was not wrong—felt in Léopold a tenacious opponent of his vast and chimerical political schemes. He saw clearly that the presence on the throne of Belgium of this near relation of the Queen of England rendered singularly more difficult the grab he secretly meditated. After the interview of 1854 the Prince Consort noted that Napoleon III, although flattered by the generous behavior of the King, still remained distrustful. Léopold, it is true, revisited France on several occasions and met the Emperor successively at

[24] A. De Ridder, "Revue catholique des Idées," May 5, 1928, p. 13.

Biarritz, Vichy, and Compiègne, but these interviews never diminished Léopold's anxiety.

Léopold's German origin had very little effect on the political relations of Belgium. It is true that they permitted the King to establish at the outset certain useful relations with important Germans, but they brought the young monarchy none of the active sympathy which might have been expected. The Germans themselves saw in the Prince of Saxe-Coburg an agent of England, and both Prussia and Austria were pleased to pile obstacles in his path. Until 1839 the tension was, as we have seen, continuous. When, in 1842, Victoria urged her uncle to draw closer to the King of Prussia, Léopold replied:

> There can be no doubt that nothing could be better than to link this country as much as possible to Germany. The public feeling was and is still favourable to this; but in Germany some years ago they were childishly ultra, and kicked us off most unnecessarily, which renders everything of the sort now much less easy.[25]

Furthermore, Léopold did not love Prussia, whose ferocious appetite he had observed at the Congress of Vienna. But he was attached to Austria; he had a high opinion of the character of Austrian statesmen and considered that essentially conservative State one of the corner-stones of European equilibrium. Concerning the Prussians there are to be found some very harsh words in his correspondence. For example, he stated on one occasion that he liked Frederick William, but he added that the King was "a pearl before swine." While he sought to obtain a good commercial treaty from Prussia

[25] Léopold to Victoria, Feb. 4, 1842.

and to maintain the best possible relations with her, the movement for German unity inspired in him not the slightest enthusiasm.

On this point Léopold differed decidedly from Stockmar, from the Prince Consort, and from his nephew Ernest. They were persuaded that to work for Prussia was to work for the good of Europe and, as Léopold put it, they were truly possessed by "the demon of German unity." [26] The King of the Belgians was more far-sighted. He watched with uneasiness the twist that had been given to the democratic movement in Berlin. It was in his opinion a destined necessity, without which, as he said to Thiers on June 8, 1849, "there would have been social dissolution without profit to any one," but he added, not without irony:

"The old policy of France was to protect the independence of the small States. A united Germany naturally will be an infinitely less convenient neighbor, but since it is in accordance with the program of eighteen forty-eight, it must be a great satisfaction to the men of that epoch."

And a few years later, on March 26, 1861, with a true foreboding of the great catastrophes of the twentieth century, the King wrote to Thiers: "Let us hope that in the present crises—for we are now always in a crisis—wisdom and moderation will prevail. If that is not the case, we may have wars of nation on nation, always very dangerous, because fanaticism is involved." [27]

Nationalism appealed neither to his reason nor to his heart. He wished Austria always to keep the upper hand

[26] Buffin et Corti, *op. cit.*, p. 251.
[27] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

in German affairs, for he saw in the diversity of the peoples of which Vienna had assumed the government the best check on that pan-Germanism whose growth he feared. But having learned, in 1849, the weakness of the Austrian Government, Léopold resigned himself to the idea of Prussian hegemony and limited his efforts to doing everything he could to keep the two powers from coming to blows. He wrote to the Archduke John:

> I act in a spirit of conciliation. Aid me, be a good preacher of peace. We ought to facilitate the task of Prussia, for she has much to do with her cold and vain people, who are at the same time poor and ambitious. . . . It is not easy to get anything from such a people by reasoning alone.[28]

But granting all this, Léopold never ceased repeating that, even on this hypothesis, Austria ought to insist upon her right to have something to say. To withdraw from Germany, he said, would be suicide, for her nine million German subjects would not long withstand the maneuvers of the other nationalities in the Hapsburg monarchy, "keystone of European politics. Her existence alone can make possible a European balance." [29]

This idea, in Léopold's opinion intimately related to the interests of Belgium, had made him seek the hand of an Austrian archduchess for his son. It drove him as well to oppose the Italian policy of Napoleon III, which inevitably led to a war between France and Austria. Léopold thought that an entente between Austria and Prussia was the best guaranty against the eventualities he feared. He saw only the revolutionary aspect of the

[28] Buffin et Corti, *op. cit.*, p. 251.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 270.

risorgimento—its repudiation of solemn treaties—and he had not words severe enough to describe its, to him, noxious character. His conviction was so strong that during the Italian campaign he had the imprudence to give Francis Joseph military advice, which, however, was no more followed than it had been asked. After the Battle of Solferino, when it appeared that Austria was no longer capable of holding out against France, the King, according to Count Corti, advised Prussia to mobilize an army on the Rhine to give more weight to its intervention in favor of the vanquished. The revelation of this interference of Léopold's in the conflict between France and Austria has given rise to exaggerated conclusions. The King has been represented as taking the part of Prussia, whereas he thought only of saving Austria.

In truth, the rôle of Léopold I in this affair had not the decisive character sometimes ascribed to it. He expressed his opinion concerning the most efficacious means of bringing the war to an end, and the event proved that the means suggested were good. It is undeniable that at that moment it was imperial France which was animated by the visions most dangerous to the equilibrium of Europe. To try to limit her ambitions and counterbalance her influence was, in truth, a simple measure of defense. For Napoleon III, in seeking to become the arbiter of the Continent, had always in view the absorption of Belgium. The King, moreover, never exceeded, in the countermaneuvers dictated by his patriotic fears, the limits imposed upon him by respect for the international engagements of his country, and no one has ever been able to cite a word or a line of his which reveals the intention of forcing upon Belgium an aggressive policy or of opening

Belgian territory to the enemies of France. On the contrary, he never stopped warning the country of the necessity of safeguarding by all possible means the inviolability of its frontiers. No analysis of his private correspondence can be profitably pursued which ignores the unexceptionable documents in which his policy for Belgium is set forth.

Toward Holland, Léopold showed no bitterness. He supported with all his strength the claims of Belgium as long as there was the least chance of success. But after the treaty of 1839 he sought the establishment of good relations with her neighbor on the north, whose interests were often one with those of his kingdom. The events of 1848 permitted the establishment of direct relations between the two courts. The King of the Belgians neglected nothing that might efface the memory of the old disagreements, and it was a great satisfaction to him in 1861 to receive at Liége King William III of the Netherlands. "He will be extremely well received here," wrote Léopold to Victoria on the event of his arrival, "his *procédé* being duly appreciated. To be very civilly received in a country which one was heir to is rather *un peu pénible*, and one feels a little awkward. . . ." This rapprochement strengthened Belgium and constituted an important element in the ensemble of supplementary guaranties through which the King strove to safeguard her threatened independence.

It is in foreign policy, the principal object of his thought, that one can best measure the worth of Léopold I, his eminent qualities, his persevering and laborious zeal. Here also were evident the limitations of his mind and certain faults in his character. Until 1848 the im-

portance of his rôle in great affairs was constantly increasing. He was the recognized intermediary for all delicate negotiations. The successive marriages which related the house of Saxe-Coburg with all the principal ruling families of Europe gave him entrée everywhere. The stability of his throne in the midst of revolutionary storms further magnified him in foreign eyes and revealed to the most skeptical the strength of the Belgian State.

But soon circumstances were reversed. In England the Queen came more and more under the influence of the Prince Consort, whose ideas differed in many points, notably in the matter of German unity, from those of the King of the Belgians. Imperial France became an enemy. New political forces were put in motion by the rise of nationalism, and the old dynastic mechanism no longer sufficed for their management. At the end of his reign he whom they called the "Nestor of Kings" already represented a dying past. The reason and moderation which were characteristic of him governed the world less and less. The very ones whose interests he best understood disregarded his advice. For example, his future son-in-law, the Archduke Maximilian, in his letters to his brother the Emperor, spoke jestingly of conversations with the King of the Belgians, at Brussels:

> They were like articles from the "Débats" and the "Indépendance." He would have decidedly liked to play the part of a political Pope—if I may so express myself—to whose decisions the other rulers of Europe must bow. He tried to scare me with the Italian situation, to give himself thereby a sort of paternal superiority.[30]

[30] Corti, "Maximilien et Charlotte," Vol. I, pp. 49, 50. See also the English version of this work, Vol. I, pp. 62, 63.

But despite his juvenile irreverence the young prince did not fail to be struck with the "good sense," "the calm and beneficent poise," "the tolerant and sagacious mien" of this veteran of diplomacy. What should be stressed here is the incessant effort of the Belgian sovereign, the enormous correspondence he kept up, his constant absorption in political matters which pursued him even into the solitude of his hunting-lodges of Ardenne or Ciergnon.

In diplomacy he was incontestably a tactician of the first order, supple and insinuating, always adapting his language to the varying mentality of his correspondents. With Thiers he was a liberal and enlightened prince, much in the fashion of 1830. With Metternich he was a sovereign of the old school, "a manipulating mind," according to the Chancellor, who knew all the tricks of the trade. With the English he took the part of a gentleman of high birth, viewing events with real disinterestedness. He gathered information, noted symptoms, provoked confidences, compared projects.

The King of the Belgians was certainly one of the best-informed men of his time, and that was an exceptional advantage for a country whose diplomats were still novices. But on the other hand Léopold I, a self-made man, an *ambitieux* who had "arrived," had a fault common among those who attain in middle life an unhoped for position. He was obstinately conservative. He did not have the far vision of the man of genius or his full comprehension of the great currents of ideas which change the face of things. He did not grasp, for example, the true character of the Italian Revolution, of which Cavour was the animating genius. He constantly suffered from illusions concerning the real strength of Austria.

Moreover, his methods, perhaps the only ones his position permitted him to use, ended by injuring his moral authority. The confidential missives, the mysterious emissaries, the calculated indiscretions, to which he resorted, in the long run engendered suspicion. He was not regarded as altogether trustworthy. "The old fox," said the Archduke Maximilian in speaking of his Brussels host. Metternich, who knew him, was always urging prudence upon the Austrian representative at Brussels.

But it is nevertheless a fact that, thanks to her King, Belgium, poorly received in the family of nations, poorly equipped for the diplomatic struggle, had the advantage during the most critical period of her growth of a guiding vigilance which she could not have got along without. If one compares the results achieved in international politics by the King himself and by his ministers, it is apparent that it was incontestably the Crown which exerted the preponderant influence. Léopold's assumption of authority violated the letter of the Constitution and was contrary to the most characteristic prejudices of the epoch.

Chapter XVI

INTERNAL STRUGGLES

THE Liberal ministry formed in 1857, under the conditions already described, was destined to remain in power until the end of the reign of Léopold I. Charles Rogier had kept Frère-Orban as Minister of Finance; he had made Tesch Minister of Justice, Baron de Vrière Minister of Foreign Affairs, General Berten Minister of War.[1] The Chamber was dissolved. The elections indicated a strong swing of public sentiment toward the Left, which gained 26 seats, assuring it 70 seats as against 38 for the Right; thus the regular functioning of the constitutional régime was restored.

But the crisis had sadly exacerbated passions on both sides. Within the Liberal party, anticlericalism became the predominant tendency. To struggle against the influence of the Church at the risk of favoring the dechristianizing of the masses, and to inflict petty annoyances on the religious orders, seemed often to be the chief concern of the majority. The spirit of conciliation in the country disappeared little by little. The Government, affected by this new spirit, no longer sought to satisfy the whole people. It carried out in legislation and administration the definite principles of the Liberal party

[1] The cabinet was remodeled on several occasions. In 1859 General Chazal received the portfolio of War; in 1865 Bara, scarcely thirty years old, was made Minister of Justice.

and minimized the consideration due the convictions of the minority.

In 1859 a law on charitable foundations was adopted. There followed in succeeding years legislation of similar purport with regard to scholarships, cemeteries, and the legal status of the Church. The majority pretended to represent the State, and conceived for itself a mission which genuine regard for internal peace would have forbidden. A note found in the papers of Charles Rogier, dated January, 1858, is very illuminating:

> The State must defend itself with its organized strength against the Church, which attacks it with its army of curés, vicars, monks, beadles, churchwardens, all mobilized and blindly obedient to the commands of the episcopate. . . . It is advisable to be extremely circumspect in the appointment of functionaries, burgomasters, aldermen, justices of the peace, clerks of court, notaries, receivers, etc.[2]

These words reflected the views of the cabinet and showed a spirit quite contrary to the generous sentiments of 1830. Nor must one forget that the nascent anticlericalism was part of a great movement hostile to religious thought itself, which appeared in literature and the natural sciences and which had its repercussion in international politics. The struggle of Piedmont against the temporal power of the Holy See, an affair specifically Italian, was regarded as a war against Christian Rome and was applauded without regard for the convictions of the Catholics and without an effort to understand the difficult problem of the liberty of the Holy See.

Belgian Catholics certainly were entitled to be treated

[2] Cf. Discailles, "Ch. Rogier," Vol. IV, p. 56.

with kindness and sympathy by those who did not share their views. They demanded no privilege. To be sure, the clergy, particularly in the country, did not always display in the exercise of their holy ministry that gentleness which irresistibly touches hearts, but their profound patriotism, the lofty dignity of their life, their benign zeal, ought to have caused occasional mistakes of pen or language to be forgotten. Statesmen like de Theux, Malou, Dechamps, Baron d'Anethan should not have been disturbing to any one, for moderation was the essence of their character.

But the spirit of conflict was now widespread. A growing faction in the majority was agitating the revision of the law of 1842 on primary education. Instead of increasing the number of schools in a way to meet the convenience of all families, instead of uniting the efforts of State and Church in the struggle against ignorance, the policy of the majority multiplied causes of conflict with regard to schools. The violence of these internal struggles, at a time when such great dangers threatened Belgium from without, was extremely unfortunate. It diverted public opinion from the patriotic concerns which should have absorbed it; it caused the country's national consciousness to be doubted abroad.

The ministry, to do it justice, did not confine itself to such matters of secondary importance, as many of its partizans would have liked. The creation of the fortified camp of Antwerp in 1859, the abolition of the octroi in 1860, the purchase from Holland of the freedom of the Scheldt in 1863, were memorable acts that evidenced the lofty ideals of which the cabinet was capable and the high capacity of several of its members. These are its

true titles to the respect of posterity; the rest may well be forgotten. When the ministers pursued a national policy in the service of all the citizens they received the encouragement and support of the Crown. Their merely anticlerical efforts were viewed by the King with regret and disapproval.

Léopold very well understood that a constitutional sovereign cannot hope to realize all he desires, prevent all he deplores. The signatures he appends to the acts of the responsible Government in no sense imply his approval. The King may state his objections, give advice; but if his warnings are neglected he must content himself with the lesser evil, distinguish between the essential and the incidental, and secure for the future as much freedom of action as possible. The Crown's chance comes later, much later, when the mistake made in ignoring his advice begins to show its consequences. It may indeed be his son or his grandson who harvests the fruit of his disregarded wisdom. Léopold I complied without too great difficulty with these requirements of his position; he did not at all hamper the majority in the attainment of its more pressing desires, but in return he bargained for measures he considered vital to the fundamental interests of the nation. After 1857 national defense became his great objective. An attentive observer of Belgian political life, Woeste, reproaches the King for having given too great a preponderance to military matters; assuredly these matters are not to be disdained, but moral interests are far more important.[3] The King seems, nevertheless, to have made the best of a difficult situation.

[3] Cf. Woeste, "Vingt ans de polémique."

The designs of Napoleon III on Belgium, although they were not fully exposed until after Léopold's death, called for rigorous measures of defense. It was necessary at all costs not only to render the conquest of Belgium as difficult as possible but to do it in such a way that every one would know that erasing the little kingdom from the map would be no mere pastime. Belgian resistance had to be capable of being prolonged sufficiently to allow a European crisis to develop and permit the effective intervention of England, Austria, or Russia. It must not be forgotten that at that time the French fleet was a close second to the British, and that a war between the two nations might have lasted a long time. The existence of a thoroughly modern fortified position connected with the sea via the Scheldt would permit Belgium to await the outcome confidently.

Léopold obtained for the vast project which he had in mind the sincere and convinced support of Frère-Orban and Charles Rogier. The first bill, referred to as that of the *petite enceinte,* was rejected by the Chamber in 1858. A larger and more complete project, the work of Brialmont, an engineer officer of international reputation, was adopted in 1859. The King used all his influence and authority. He obtained by his insistence the consent of the cabinet to the great expenditures required. After the defeat of the first bill he kept the ministry in power, urged its members not to be at all discouraged, and somewhat peremptorily forced on them as a colleague General Chazal, whose energy and oratorical talent he thought would help carry the day. The peace of Villafranca seemed to him an unanswerable argument. He wrote to Frère-Orban on July 13, 1859:

I do not have to tell you that this peace—or, rather, this arrangement—far from diminishing our dangers, augments them frightfully. You have courage. You will not let yourself be influenced by the arguments which will come to you from all sides. My reasoning is very simple: We have but a little time; let us employ it to fortify not only Antwerp but our political existence.[4]

The King made a minute study of the technical problems involved. He consulted with foreign military notables, and brought to Brussels the Russian general Todleben, the defender of Sebastopol, to advise him. Chazal was his man. The King accorded him a particular affection which gave him a place apart among the other ministers. To the general were confided the most ardent wishes of the aging sovereign, who wrote him from Marseilles on October 20, 1859:

That after my twenty-eight years of experience there remain people in Belgium who know better than I the affairs of Europe, and who are better able to appreciate what is needed for the existence of Belgium, to which they had already put an end in 1831, is quite strange, but such is life. . . . Would that one could moderate a little this fruitless struggle of the parties!

At Antwerp itself the maintenance of the two citadels and the establishment of military casements around the fortifications had excited violent opposition to the Government and given birth to the "Meeting," which included all the adversaries of the projects fathered by the King. The Right, despite the efforts of Adolphe Dechamps, who had a loftier conception of politics, made the demands of these private interests their own. The name of the King was involved in the heated polemics

[4] P. Hymans, "Frère-Orban," Vol. II, p. 76.

that followed. A flood of pamphlets and caricatures excited opinion to such a point that his popularity in Antwerp was seriously affected. But Léopold held his ground. On November 6, 1862, he received a delegation from the city of Antwerp and set forth the reasons which obliged the Government to proceed with its plans. The firmness of his language, the coolness of the reception he gave them greatly impressed his listeners, who were left with no doubt that the Crown was entirely with the cabinet.

"The great object of our national policy," the King said in conclusion, "must be to maintain the neutrality of the country, but this policy will not win the confidence of all our neighbors unless they are convinced that the country is really strong and in a position to fulfil the obligations its political existence imposes upon it. You know the affectionate devotion that I have always had for the city of Antwerp. I have always sought to protect you from any danger, and when that has been impossible I have shared it with you."

The purchase of new artillery in 1861 was accomplished in the same way. Belgium's escape from invasion during the Franco-Prussian War has been called a miracle, but the improvements Léopold I had made in its system of defense and the strength of its army had a great deal to do with its good fortune. He felt it was his duty to prepare for future difficulties. He felt that independent Belgium was threatened by mortal perils which she only partly realized. He worked unceasingly to secure backing for her on the outside. He wished also to fortify her within, to give her the framework she lacked, to supply her with material means of resistance which would

support her just claims. This supreme duty was far more important to him than popular applause, to whose comforting warmth he was by no means indifferent.

Outside of Antwerp, moreover, there was no lack of applause. The unrest caused by the attacks of the French press and the shrewdly suspected aims of the Imperialists at Paris increased the loyalty of the citizens. Divided as the Belgian people were by so many lesser quarrels, the Crown appeared more and more clearly as the living center of the State and the symbol of its will to live in independence. Patriotism was manifested instinctively in acts of loyalty to the Crown. In 1859 the statue of Léopold I was solemnly placed at the top of the column of the Congress. Thus the commemoration of the work accomplished by the men of the Revolution culminated in an act of faith in the monarchy.

The same year the birth of the Count of Hainaut, son of the Duke and Duchess of Brabant, united the country more closely still to the family of the monarch.

"As long as I live," the King said in reply to the congratulations of the Chamber, "I will serve Belgium as a shield. . . . It is necessary that Belgium have a life of her own, that she be something more than an aggregation of provinces. It is necessary that she have a center of action. I ask for the confidence of the Chamber and the country."

In 1860 the annexation of Nice and Savoy, which French writers pointed out to the Belgians as an example, aroused public opinion to such an extent as to give to the celebration of the national holidays exceptional brilliancy. The provincial councils united to pay homage to the King. He once more visited a series of provincial cities.

"Nations die only by suicide," he declared with pride. "Belgium has just proved that she knows it and wills to live independent."

But Léopold's health was affected. He had reached the age of seventy. During the summer of 1862 he suffered from dysentery followed by a severe attack of gallstones, and seemed to be close to the end. He made, however, an almost complete recovery, and his return to Brussels on September 24 was the occasion of an unparalleled popular demonstration on the boulevards. "The remark of Proud'hon to the Emperor: 'Sire, Belgium awaits you!' was not very strongly corroborated yesterday," observed the happy King, in a caustic letter addressed to General Chazal.

The monarch indisputably occupied a position of great significance in the country. The court was the center of an animated and brilliant social life. The heir to the throne and his beautiful wife took part whenever possible in all gatherings having to do with the fine arts, charity, or the economic life of the country. The Duke of Brabant was timid before his father, who did not know him well and who did not realize how deeply his delicate and studious son was impregnated with his own ideas. But the younger Léopold was already dreaming great dreams, some glimpses of which may be caught in his speeches before the Senate. With an eager patriotism he urged upon the politicians the fruits of his father's experience. The young Count of Flanders frequented the salons of the capital. The marriage of Princess Charlotte to Maximilian of Austria attached the dynasty to the old courts.

As for Léopold, he resided habitually at Laeken. His private life is surrounded with some mystery. It is

known that a Belgian lady, married as a matter of decorum to a servant exiled in Germany, with her charm and musical talent captivated his fickle heart. At the fêtes of the court he was always ready to render homage to beauty. Ugliness hurt him. He wrote drolly to Queen Victoria on February 3, 1860: "We had some new English families *inconceivably ugly;* it is quite a calamity, they look as if they had been selected on purpose. Having still the happiness of being one of your Privy Council, I mean to propose some measure to obviate such a sad state of affairs."

But these flashes of humor became rare. At home the King grew morose, severe. He spoke seldom to his officers, never to his servants. He saw his children only occasionally and communicated with them in writing even when they were under his roof. When ill and in horrible pain he shut himself up in solitude. But whenever his strength permitted he worked ferociously. He came regularly to the Palace of Brussels for his audiences, for he continued to maintain personal relations with the members of the diplomatic corps and to receive all notables passing through Brussels. With stoic courage he fought off Death. It is whispered that he painted, and tried to deceive even his personal servants about his health. These stories bear the marks of malevolence and exaggeration. We shall do better to see him as Baron Beyens, an eye-witness, albeit a youthful one, presents him in 1863:

> Of the beautiful, regular face, of the medallion-like profile . . . there remained, alas, but angular and severe contours, a face of polished parchment cut with wrinkles. A top hat covered his black and lustrous wig, and the King was content to raise

two gloved fingers to it in answer to the shouts of the crowd. The sight of him called forth an extraordinary feeling of respect, such as I have never noticed in the case of any other sovereign, even the old Emperor of Austria. One would have said that the people of Brussels, regardless of class, were conscious of what they owed this impassive septuagenarian who seemed alive and human only in his glance.[5]

If age, sickness, and care had destroyed that evenness of temper that had formerly distinguished him, he had kept certain impulses of the heart very much alive. To the end he inspired a keen and unalterable affection in his intimate assistants. "The good and venerated King," Baron Stockmar always wrote of him, to the close of his life.

Victoria's profound tenderness toward him never varied. On the death of the Prince Consort in 1861, it was from this old uncle that the stricken Queen sought consolation and support. The poor widow cried out her grief to him in terms that show a limitless confidence. "I feel like a poor hunted hare," said she, "like a child without a mother, lost, frightened, and weak." And the King who also had suffered, the King who had seen many of his illusions shattered, found, to soothe this pain, words of an infinite gentleness quite inconsistent with the hardness often attributed to him. Upon the death of the Prince he went to Windsor. He strove to make easier the newly widowed Queen's first contact with affairs; he encouraged her to live; he comforted her with hopes of eternity. Later, it was at his suggestion that the betrothal of the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, to Princess Alexandra of Denmark was concluded at Brussels,

[5] Baron Beyens, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 375.

and the King rejoiced in the happiness this event brought to his niece.

Léopold, when he wished it to be disclosed, sometimes showed the real kindness of his heart, and retained in his old age an enthusaism for the beauties of nature—the trees, the sky of Italy, the incomparable scenes of his dear Lake Como. In the royal family he showed most affection for his daughter Charlotte. Her name reminded him of his first wife, and in her character he found the traits he had loved in the second. Still more, perhaps, he recognized in her his own bold ambition. And to see her wear a crown he put his prudence in his pocket and refrained from advising her against the unfortunate Mexican adventure.

The relations of the King with the Government had become much less intimate than formerly. He gave up presiding at cabinet meetings. He saw his ministers but rarely. Everything was handled through van Praet, who became, as time went on, more and more inseparable from his master. No one has been able to define exactly the nature of this long association. Even after Léopold's death his faithful servant had nothing to say about the rôle he had so long played in the shadow of the throne. No one knew, said Adolphe Dechamps, if it was Léopold who made van Praet or van Praet who made Léopold. But as the King aged, van Praet more and more held the pen, carried on negotiations, and took to the ministers the sometimes disagreeable messages that the palace had for the Rue de la Loi.

Léopold did not like Rogier. He considered the man slightly vulgar and the politician singularly narrowed by age. Between them were frequent disagreements. As early

as 1852 the minister complained to his brother of meeting with antagonism at the palace. After 1857 the coolness of the King was marked, especially after Rogier, who was not prepared for the task, became Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Although he was grateful to the cabinet for the zeal and courage it displayed in the matter of the Antwerp forts, he was irritated by its weakness for anticlerical radicalism. Obliged to consent to many measures that displeased him, the King was nervous and easily offended. In 1859 there was a lively quarrel because the relations of the Minister of War with the King were made the subject of a note framed by the Prime Minister. A little later the latter complained vigorously to van Praet of the inertia with which the Crown delayed his measures. Necessary decrees waited long for the royal signature; it was a real "refusal of administrative coöperation." On April 2, 1860, Rogier returned to the charge: "The reception which has been given many of my proposals unfortunately leads me to suppose that my intentions are not understood, and it is very painful to me, after nearly thirty years of trial, to observe a distrust which wounds as much as it paralyzes me." [6]

The disagreement was accentuated when Rogier opposed the removal of his brother from the embassy at Paris. The lesser Rogier was persona non grata to the Emperor, and had otherwise shown himself unequal to a diplomatic post of the first importance. Italian affairs were another subject of conflict between the King and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The majority in Parliament applauded the attacks of Piedmont upon the Pope

[6] Discailles, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 121.

and, as far as the cabinet was concerned, recognition of the King of Italy was more an act of internal policy than a diplomatic step. Léopold saw the affair from a different angle and he did not wish Belgium to take the initiative by going to meet the conqueror. He wrote to Rogier:

> Belgium maintains the diplomatic relations that she has always had with King Victor Emmanuel, but it is not for her as a neutral State to attach to her official recognition any other significance nor to prejudice the rights of others. The question from this point of view is very important to the position of Belgium; she must hereafter beware of seeing Sardinian principles applied to her own political existence.

In these circumstances Léopold declined the assistance of his Minister of Foreign Affairs in drawing up the reply he was to make to the address of the new nuncio.

The legislation proposed by the cabinet incurred his censure quite as much as its administrative acts. The recently published papers of Van den Peereboom show how stubbornly the King opposed the plans of his ministers prior to the opening of the Chambers in 1864. "His Majesty makes life insupportable to us," he wrote; "he quibbles over each of my acts, and when I present him the draft of a decree with one hand, to obtain it it is necessary that I present my resignation with the other." [7] Rogier had to follow the King to Geneva and Marseilles to try to snatch his approval of projects which the King believed dictated by party spirit.

On March 22, 1865, after a protest from the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines, the King dared write him a letter in which appeared these words:

[7] "Léopold I^{er} et le parlementarisme, in "Le Flambeau," Nov. 1, 1928.

Your Eminence knows how much I should have wished that the Senate consider the observations you submitted to it in the name of the episcopate touching certain dispositions of the law relative to scholarships, and the repugnance with which I yielded to political necessity in sanctioning the law once it had been passed.[8]

The proposed bill relative to the legal status of the Church displeased him still more. He resisted for a long time all efforts to obtain his signature to the ministry's proposal. He flew into a passion against "the order to sign" which he contended the ministry addressed to him. "If I refuse to sign this measure," he wrote to van Praet, "they can not say that it is because I am too favorable to the Catholics; I am a Protestant! Rogier promised me in 1857 to be conciliatory. . . . Has he been so?"[9] Although he ended by yielding, it was with the definite idea of gaining time, and at Ostend the following year, on September 10, 1865, Léopold gave Mgr. Dechamps, then Bishop of Namur, the assurance that the project was "buried." The Catholics nevertheless complained. They reproached the King with giving the cabinet free rein. They did not know how vigorously the King had tried to block the measures to which they objected. This was revealed only much later, for the King was careful to exercise his prerogatives with discretion, in such a manner as not to compromise his constitutional freedom of responsibility.

The political tension in the country disturbed the King, always anxious with regard to external dangers. "Here we are well," he wrote to Thiers on March 14, 1860.

[8] Juste, "Léopold I^er^," p. 256.
[9] "Léopold I^er^ et le parlementarisme," in "Le Flambeau," Nov. 1, 1928.

"I only regret too great violence in the parties, the result of the irregularity of the flight of the cabinet in 1857." The flight of the cabinet in 1857! Note the severe criticism of the attitude of De Decker. "The irritation which has continued in the Conservative party proves the progress of constitutional ideas, for it is the undoubted irregularity in the events of 1857 which irritates it most. It would have submitted to a more regular procedure." [10] On November 13, 1864, writing to the same correspondent with regard to the situation, he observed, "I must add that I am not satisfied with it. The parties are extremely violent, which can only do harm, and which in a little country is rather ridiculous." [11]

But although he desired to reduce the intensity of party feeling and did his best to do so, the King did not go so far as to try to put the opposition in power. The support which the Right gave to the program of the Antwerp Meeting, its desire to economize on national defense, inspired him with distrust. However, despite internal dissensions among the Catholics, the elections of June 9, 1863, had been unfavorable to the Left. A partial election having further weakened the majority, the cabinet offered to resign. In January, 1864, the King tried to form a moderate Liberal cabinet. He vainly addressed himself to Pirmez, Henri de Brouckere, Faider, Dubois-Thorn, Nothomb. The Right begged off in its turn, hardly wishing to take power without a majority in the Chamber on which it could rely. The crisis lasted until April. The King then called Dechamps, who, instead of limiting himself to merely carrying on the administration of affairs,

[10] Lansac de Laborie, *op. cit.*, p. 335.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 338.

as the King desired, submitted to his Majesty a detailed ministerial program indicating a movement toward democracy in the Conservative party.

Dechamps proposed lowering the qualifications for voting. The King objected:

"I must give you the point of view of royalty," he said to the Catholic leader on April 28. "If you Conservatives begin a steeplechase with the Liberals, where will it lead us?" [12]

To tell the truth, the Right, as a matter of tactics, hesitated to assume power, while the King, on the other hand, hesitated to entrust them with it. . . . Other motives perhaps induced him to leave things as they were. He may have seriously questioned the prudence of exposing the radical elements of the Left to the temptation of merciless opposition to the Government. The result was that the Rogier cabinet stayed in office. The relations of the premier with the King, however, remained strained, and van Praet had all he could do to prevent a rupture. Faider, who played a part in this last ministerial crisis of Léopold's reign, recalls the impression that the royal audience of January 23, 1864, left upon him. We will quote him, for nothing has been written on Léopold more complete or more penetrating:

I saw him under difficult circumstances. His health was momentarily restored; although tried by long sufferings, he had an erect body, a noble and resolute bearing, and a kingly mien. I was, as always, struck by that severe but courteous kindness which characterized his official relations. First he discussed seriously the business with which we were all concerned at that time. He gave his views, criticized opinions, judged men and expedients, sought

[12] E. de Moreau, "Adolphe Dechamps," pp. 324 *et seq.*

and pronounced conclusions. He had all his accustomed vigor of character and freshness of mind. Then, abandoning the serious subjects, which seemed exhausted, he changed the tone of the conversation and gave himself over little by little to that tranquil gaiety which was natural to him, and which, interspersed with abundant reminiscences and a fine irony, had a captivating charm.

I have remembered this interview because during it I saw what I have always observed in this extraordinary man—a true knowledge of affairs, which he judged with calm lucidity; a mixture of passion and good nature; a penchant for literary reminiscences, curious anecdotes; a fine gaiety with which to end a conversation seriously begun. That was the whole man, combining all forms of wit, discussing great questions, gravely considering his own conduct, pouring out all he had of intellectual grace, innumerable recollections, and delicate pleasantry. . . .

He brought to the service of the country a deliberate will, a solid education, a vast experience, a subtle finesse. He judged men promptly. He was slow to give his affection, but it was constant. His kindness was real but restrained; although it fell from above, it was but the more precious. He had to a supreme degree the stature of royalty, majesty of bearing and glance, and, as Pascal says, *"la grandeur naturelle,"* with an air of empire and authority. . . .

He was infinitely clever, and I can repeat what was often said, that he always had more cleverness than the cleverest of his counselors. He offered few objections, because he understood promptly and thoroughly. He asked little; he got what he wanted without insistence; he temporized when he was not satisfied. He showed himself, in dealing with affairs, a truly constitutional king, assured of the probity of his ministers, respecting their responsibility. . . .

He never did deliberate harm to any one. He was not at all revengeful. He never in his life inflicted wounds or gave offense. Certainly he did not love all those who served him, and he did not reign thirty-five years without feeling resentment or anger. I can even say that his wrath was terrible, and then his fine deep eye, ordinarily a trifle veiled, shone with penetrating light,

but he recovered himself promptly without the idea of revenge having entered his mind. His vengeance was limited to a sarcasm the sharpness of which was sometimes unequaled. . . .

He was naturally indulgent; he liked to exercise the power of pardon. He himself added notes to petitions handed him by those whom he loved. He never authorized an execution without long hesitation and cruel agony. . . . He liked and cultivated the arts; music delighted him. . . . He enjoyed meeting the learned men of all countries; he attended their discussions, received them at his table, conversed with them in almost all the languages of Europe, and left them charmed and astonished. . . .

It was in his country, in his good Belgium, as he often said, that he was happiest: not an instant of trouble; a people who adored him and who in many instances almost stifled him with passionate demonstrations. . . . Léopold I had a profound sense of his happiness. "I am growing old," he said to me, half smiling, half melancholy; "I shall probably not live much longer, but I can say, after a long reign, that I have been a happy King." [13]

[13] Ch. Faider, "Le Roi Léopold I^{er} et la royauté belge," in the "Bulletin de l'Académie," second series, Vol. XXI, No. 5.

Chapter XVII

THE DEATH OF LÉOPOLD I

THE portrait which Charles Faider traced of Léopold I at the close of his reign penetrates more deeply the psychology of the man and the King than those flattering and decorative metaphors that have passed from official addresses of welcome into the school manuals and prize-books. The magistrate, the minister, the humanitarian, the scholar has in the lines quoted at the end of the last chapter admirably presented the sympathetic and interesting figure of the first King of the Belgians, and history must consider this evidence in opposition to the unflattering picture of the aging monarch painted by Count Corti from the accounts of Austrian diplomats. These latter have represented him as a maniac weakened physically and mentally, expending in objectless intrigues what energy remained to him. Léopold I suffered no such decay. The correspondence of the last years of his life confirms the judgment of Faider.

To form a just estimate of a public personage who has lived in the laudatory atmosphere of courts, it is evidently necessary to take into account the malicious criticisms that circulate under cover—without forgetting, however, that it is thus that flatterers often avenge themselves for their own baseness. Léopold I never posed as a paragon of virtue. He liked women, and money. His

frequent journeys, his slightly mysterious private life, concealed indiscretions whisperings of which damaged his prestige. But pleasure played only a subordinate rôle in his life and he always manifested publicly his devotion to high moral ideals.

Léopold was a deist. He believed firmly in a future life and a superior justice. Although he was nominally a Lutheran he paid little attention to the dogmas preached by the various denominations to inhabitants of what he called "our strange planet."

His love of action made him wish to put his stamp on the youthful Princes of his house. The man who is often represented as a disillusioned skeptic laid aside sophistication in his relations with the young people he influenced. His letters to Victoria and to his Coburg nephews prove that he felt deeply the grave responsibilities of education. For example, on May 21, 1833, he recommended to his niece Victoria, then aged fourteen, the daily examination of her conscience as an indispensable exercise of moral hygiene. In a long epistle he urged her "to recapitulate the events of the day, and the motives which made one act oneself. . . . Persons in high situations must particularly guard themselves against selfishness and vanity. . . . To learn to know oneself, to judge oneself with truth and impartiality, must be the great objects of one's exertion; they are only attainable by constant and cool self-examination." He wished the child to have some serious purpose in life, that she temper her character, that she learn to judge things at their true worth.

Two years later, on the occasion of the confirmation of the Princess, the King addressed to her from Beverloo a little sermon full of tenderness. "I am," he wrote, "on

an immense heath surrounded by 16,000 men, mostly young and gay, cooking, singing, working, and not very like the stern old Covenanters." The rake in the pulpit, in truth! But the uncle, after this humorous beginning, became serious. He held up to the future Queen of England, as the supreme Christian virtue, humility of heart. He warned her against hypocrisy. "Let your dear character always be true and loyal," he iterated.

In like circumstances the King lavished advice upon his nephews Ernest and Albert of Saxe-Coburg. He urged upon these Princes humility and severity for themselves and indulgence for others. He desired them, also, to be loyal and sincere in public life.

Similar moral considerations dominated the education of his own children, who were subjected to a perhaps too severe discipline. He laid out for them a life of work, to prepare all three of them for the duties of government. In his prime, as in the evening of his life, he always spoke of death with a sense of the responsibilities of the human soul and the mystery of the hereafter. The respect he showed for the Catholic religion was derived not only from his instinctive love of order, but also from his faith in the moral force of Christianity. Before his accession he was affiliated with Masonry, but the anticlericalism of the Belgian lodges never received his support. In 1864 some attention was attracted by a letter in which the Controller of the Civil List granted, by order of the King, a gift to an association for aiding the sick and giving Christian burial to the dead.

"Thus to revive gospel charity," said Viscount de Conway, "is an answer to those senseless men who, under the

pretext of civilization and progress, would drive society away from Christianity, to fall into barbarism." [1]

Léopold I was ambitious for himself, for his children, for his house, but this ambition although it was sometimes said to be insatiable was not at all vulgar. Guizot, a competent contemporary observer, wrote in his memoirs:

> Consenting, rather than eager, to become King, patiently moderate in his ambition almost to the point of seeming indifference, a sagacious observer of the dispositions of peoples and thoroughly familiar with Europe, its sovereigns, their counselors, the characters of men, and the relations of States, he excelled in the art of managing diverse or contrary interests and knew how to await opportunity as well as how to seize it.[2]

Léopold had nothing about him of the ruthless gambler who would force fortune.

In accepting the crown he contracted obligations with the Belgian people the gravity of which weighed on his conscience. In 1831, to fulfil them, he loyally exposed his life, like the brave soldier that he was. His indefatigable political activity was inseparable from his idea of duty. It was with this thought that he gave to his dynasty a character so thoroughly Belgian. "My children will be with you when I am no longer here," he said, and he made patriots of them, attaching them by all the bonds of affection to the country they were born to serve.

The old King himself loved Belgium more and more as the years went by. He appreciated, as he said one day, her touching fidelity, the sureness and the constancy of her affections, the good-will of her people, their ardor for work. He sought larger destinies for her. Singular

[1] S. Balau, "Soixante-dix ans d'histoire contemporaine," p. 222.
[2] Guizot, "Mémoires," Vol. II, p. 265.

colonial attempts in Ethiopia, Oceania, East Africa, and Guatemala—enterprises supported by the King—show that the great idea carried out by Léopold II had its origin in his father's mind. The ambition of Léopold I was not, then, strictly selfish. He deliberately chose to be dominated by that monarchic instinct which merged his personal future and that of his race with the future of the country which had called him.

The illness that brought him near death in 1862 continued to affect him. "I have now borne for thirty months the most atrocious suffering," he confided to General Chazal on March 29, 1862. He slept poorly and passed the long hours of insomnia in reading by the candelabra always lighted in his room at night. He was at the end of his nervous control and spent long periods in an almost complete solitude.

In 1864, however, Léopold had some respite. He went to Italy, Switzerland, and France, and met Napoleon III at Vichy; he made a short sojourn at the camp of Beverloo and an official visit to Maeseyck. His letters at this period show that his mind was still lucid. The Schleswig-Holstein affair and the American Civil War caused him lively concern. He favored an attempt at mediation by France which did not succeed. Mexico, where his daughter had gone to found an empire, became a source of greater and greater anxiety.

The year 1865, the thirty-fourth of his reign, opened sadly. His health again grew worse. His eyes were now affected, and the doctors insisted on operation after operation. In the spring he was able to make his usual visit to the Queen of England, but he returned to Belgium stricken with bronchitis and suffering more than ever.

He tried a cure at Ostend. "I have been excessively ill," he wrote to Chazal on April 15. "I have had to moan horribly," he wrote him shortly after. "I cannot decide to give up my solitude. I am always sick, and God knows how long it will last. It is a complete breaking up," he wrote June 16.[3] One sees in these extracts from his intimate correspondence that he did not deceive himself or try to fool his friends. The end obviously was drawing near. He was not unaware of the fact.

In June he called the Bishop of Bruges, Mgr. Faict, hurriedly to Ostend and did not try in the least to hide his condition from him. He even showed him his leg all swollen with dropsy. Then, with a strange emphasis which seemed to the bishop the prelude of a second conversation that never came, the King asked "Monsieur de Bruges" if he intended to be in his episcopal city for some time, as he wished to be able to call him in case of need. He said nothing more of what was in his mind, which was obviously filled with most serious thoughts, but Mgr. Faict was convinced that the King was thinking of embracing Catholicism.

The Princes of the house of Coburg successively made the pilgrimage to Belgium to see their illustrious relative a last time. Victoria, the well-loved niece, crossed the sea and spent several days near him. In October it was the turn of the King of Portugal, his nephew. The news of Palmerston's death came shortly afterward and sounded in the King's ears the knell of an epoch. Always attentive to the realities of politics, animated to the very end by the true spirit of parliamentary monarchy, Léo-

[3] Juste, *op. cit.*, pp. 626, 627.

pold, after casting some flowers on the bier of that great minister whom the sovereigns in the intimacy of their correspondence had nicknamed "Pilgerstein," advised the Queen to work with Russell and Granville.

"But," he observed, "the House of Commons is the most important point and Gladstone is naturally the leader." [4] He evidently wished to warn her against her antipathy to that statesman.

Shortly after, the Crown-Prince and the Crown-Princess of Prussia arrived at Brussels. "Vicky," the favorite daughter of Victoria, had insisted on coming to say good-by. The King received her at Laeken on October 24. She was accompanied by her son, a poor little boy with a bad arm, on whom his English grandmother had already dwelt tenderly in her letters. Léopold was touched by these affectionate attentions. On the twenty-eighth, although it caused him pain to lift a pen, he wrote to the Queen a letter with this affecting close: "And now may God bless you. I mean, as long as Providence will keep me fit for it, to render you every service in my power. Ever your devoted old uncle."

When the founder of the Belgian monarchy saw little Prince William of Prussia, the future was of course closed to his tired eyes. "The boy," he wrote to Victoria, "I am very fond of . . ." What thoughts this simple family reunion stirs up to-day! The son of "Vicky," succeeding his father and his grandfather, became in his turn Emperor and King; he filled the world with the sound of his name. Fifty years after this visit to Laeken he covered Belgium with blood and ruins, while another King of the

[4] Léopold I to Queen Victoria, Oct. 20, 1865.

Belgians, the grandson of this same Léopold who stroked William's blond curls, defended on the battle-field the work of the Belgian dynasty. It was afterward from this very Belgium, which he believed he had conquered, that William II saw the fall of his throne and the ruin of his house. Perhaps the kindness of the old King for the child weighed against the man in the scales of eternal Justice? Time, certainly, had given significance to the simple and intimate scene which was enacted unnoticed in 1865.

Early in November Léopold wished to spend some days at the Château d'Ardenne. He left with Conway and a doctor. The King had grown more and more attached to this beautiful estate, the wild and picturesque situation of which had unfailing charm for him. He had been an indefatigable hunter, pushing his meanderings into the forests of Nassogne and Freyer. The last foxes of the forest of Saint-Hubert fell before his rifle. But those days were over. Léopold was profoundly stricken. In this retreat he received desolating news from Mexico. "What counts in America," he wrote to Maximilian on November 12, "is success—everything else is mere poetry and waste of money. And now, God bless you. I can say no more." [5] These were the last lines he addressed to the imperial couple, soon to meet their tragic fate.

Illness, however, never induced the King to omit the least detail of his duties. On November 10, for example, Conway, who resided at the château, wrote him to reassure him of the suitableness of the appointment of two notaries, at Paliseuil and at Heyst-op-den-Berg, which

[5] Corti, "Maximilien et Charlotte," Vol. II, pp. 552, 553.

was proposed for his signature. On November 23 the King, whose illness had become alarming, was taken back to Laeken, but notwithstanding his condition he signed a sheaf of decrees.

On December 2 a note in the "Moniteur" officially announced the King's illness and foretold a fatal issue. There is but little information concerning the last days of Léopold I. The press limited itself to the laconic bulletins from the palace. The King had succeeded in establishing around his private life a zone of silence that was not easily broken. The news filtered out with difficulty. Furthermore, he saw virtually no one and did not always admit to his bedside even the doctors who came to treat him. The city was assured that on December 2 the King had had his pianist come so that he might hear the overture of "Tannhäuser." On December 4 he sanctioned a last appointment.

His strength declined hourly under persistent dysentery. On December 9 the situation appeared hopeless; nevertheless the King lasted through the night. On the morning of December 10 the doctors stated that death was now imminent. The royal family then disregarded the orders which had kept them away from the dying man. According to the account of Baron Beyens, based on the recollections of J. van Praet who witnessed the scene, the Duchess of Brabant kneeled at the bedside of her father-in-law and questioned him in German.

"Sire," she said, not forgetting even at that moment the formula of respect, "sire, do you regret the sins you have committed? Do you regret the scandals you have caused?" The King sighed painfully and let fall from his lips the word "Ja."

"Sire," resumed the duchess in a very gentle voice that sounded like a prayer in the silence of the room, "in the name of the love you bear the memory of the Queen, wouldn't you, to draw close to her, to be very near her soul, be converted to the religion that was hers?" The King seemed to reflect, to hesitate. The duchess renewed the prayer and the reply was finally heard: "Nein." [6]

The protestant chaplain, M. Becker, was then introduced and he addressed some words to the dying man.

"Yes, may God pardon all my sins," Léopold said in a still intelligible voice. The ministers, the presidents of the Chambers, joined the intimate servants grouped around the bed. The King kissed his children and grandchildren, and, his hand in the hand of the future Queen, at a quarter of twelve in the morning, he sighed for the last time.

"What the King did and said exceeded a hundred times my expectations," wrote Mgr. Dechamps to a friend after having received a circumstantial description of his last moments.[7] The Grand Orient, on its side, announced that the King died "with the calm and serenity of the just and the stoicism of the true Mason."

Léopold I died in the same palace at which he had arrived with so many hopes on July 19, 1831. The first personages of Belgium were again gathered about him, but this time it was to witness the supreme defeat which subjects royal majesty to the inexorable law of equality. The reasons of state which had been his guide during his life determined the disposition of his remains. Queen

[6] Baron Beyens, "Le Second Empire," Vol. I, p. 387.
[7] Cf. M. de Meulemeester, "Le Cardinal Dechamps et Léopold II, p. 10. Becker, "Souvenirs d'un témoin oculaire de la fin de S. M. Léopold I[er]."

Victoria revealed that the King had on several occasions expressed the desire to sleep his last sleep in Windsor Chapel, beside the young wife whose exalted love had brought to him not only his high fortune but an intimate happiness which he said he had not found since. The name of Charlotte had been on his lips in his last moment.

But always wise, subordinating sentiment to his first duty as sovereign, Léopold had refrained from expressing in his will this personal wish. The Queen of England, yielding in her sadness to the impulses of her woman's heart, dared to call the attention of the Belgian court to the desire of her uncle. The Duke of Brabant replied that he was not unaware of the wish, but that the royal will made no mention of it. The Belgian people, moreover, could not consent to a posthumous separation. So on the night of December 12 the body of Leopold I was carried with great pomp to Brussels, while in the chapel at Laeken, where Queen Louise-Marie had been buried provisionally, the sepulcher of the King was prepared. At the same time, for political reasons, the woman and the young children who in secret had brightened his declining days were removed from the country.

The royal funeral was magnificent. Around the mortal remains of Léopold I an imposing cortège of princes and an entire people in mourning testified to the renown acquired by the first sovereign of independent Belgium and the great place he had won in the affections of the country. Belgium, truly, seemed to have lost a father. Through streets whose lamps were veiled and whose house-fronts were draped in black, amid an enormous crowd of sincere mourners, the King, lying on a funeral car drawn by

twelve caparisoned horses, crossed Brussels for the last time. While the heiress to the throne of Great Britain and Ireland lay alone in her English tomb, her beloved husband, the fine cavalier with the romantic profile, whom life had made an old man worn with suffering, wrinkled by care, moved slowly toward the royal necropolis, to take up, at the call of duty, the post assigned to the ancestor of the Belgian dynasty.

Adolphe Dechamps, one of Léopold's former ministers, wrote in the "Revue Générale" of 1866:

> King Léopold was and wished above everything to be a constitutional prince. He sought to have the country accept the policy which he believed the wisest and the best, but he did not try to impose it upon her. He proceeded by means of influence and counsel. He had political preferences, he desired that they prevail for the sake of the country, but he desired that they become the preferences of the country itself. . . . Never has a government been less personal, and never has a monarch exerted an influence more powerful, more legitimate, and better accepted by the nation.

Parliamentary monarchy found a particularly favorable field in Belgium. The Belgian people loathed extremes. The parties which were formed were both constitutional, able to alternate in control of the Government without danger to the stability of the régime. The directing personalities belonged if not to the same social, at least to the same intellectual group. The ministers all brought to the Government habits of reserve, of discretion, of obedience to usages, drawn from common foundations of bourgeois education. The Constitution was the object of sincere and universal respect.

In the beginning, however, the country lacked men. This was Léopold's opportunity. In that profound peace which, as we have seen, he constantly strove to maintain because he knew it to be a condition of his success, with infinite tact and vision he set the delicate institutions of the country in motion. He did more, something which his contemporaries could not entirely perceive. He himself, the elected of the Congress, really planted monarchy in the soil of a country which for three centuries had not produced kings. He gave a permanent and hereditary character to the State, a thinking head, interested in the public welfare even for the future. He created a tradition which conferred on the Crown a broader right of counsel than has been achieved elsewhere under the parliamentary system. He bound his family to the nation by sentimental ties the entire strength of which was not revealed until the Great War. He put his stamp upon his house and associated it intimately with the soul of the country. "That soul," as Renan said, "must be guided by a certain number of official pastors forming the continuity of the nation. That is the marvelous thing a dynasty does."

As she celebrates the centenary of her independence, Belgium, strengthened by the hands of Léopold I, enlarged and magnified by his son, defended and revivified by his grandson, realizes all she owes to the prince she chose in 1831. To all the reasons that she had in 1865 to honor his name, she has added another, which contains them all: He was the father of her kings and the initiator of the traditions that they have followed in peace and in war, for the safety of the State and the grandeur of the fatherland.

INDEX

Adair, Sir Robert, British diplomat, 59, 60, 66, 125
Adélaïde, Mme., 15, 60, 155
Albert, King of the Belgians, 155
Alexander, Emperor, 4
Alexandra, Princess, of Denmark, 304
Amelia, Princess, of Bavaria, 11
Anethan, Baron d', 296
Anticlericalism of Belgium, 295
Antwerp, camp of, 296; Dutch expelled from, 99; fortification of, 299 *et seq.;* reception to Léopold, 242
Appony, Count, 143
Ardenne, Château d', 137; Léopold's last days at, 320
Arendt, Professor, 144, 244, 246
Arlon, reception to Léopold, 242
Armistice of 1833, 104
Army, incompetency of, 51; reorganized after 1831, 64
Arnim, Count d', Minister from Prussia, 108
Arschot, Count d', 16; Grand Marshal, 151
Assembly of Frankfort, 222
Austria, attitude toward Belgium, 107; diplomatic relations ruptured, 177; diplomatic situation in 1835, 161; Emperor forced to flee, 218; hostile to Belgium, 62; ratifies Treaty of XXIV Articles, 90; war with Italy, 289; yields to Belgian neutrality, 105
Austrian Foreign Office, policy of, toward Belgium, 130

Bainville, Jacques, 282
Balfour, Lord, 260
Banning, Émile, 185
Banque Nationale established, 225
Beaulieu, E. de, 120 *note*
Beckaert-Baekeland, deputy from Courtrai, 181
Belgian Catholicism, 191 *et seq.*
Belgians, Léopold becomes king of, 6; race and language, 7
Belgium, accepts treaty of 1833, 105; and Napoleonic wars, 7; anticlericalism, 295; army in 1835, 161; army reorganized, 64; asks intervention of the powers, 43; asserts independence, 9; attitude of other European countries, 18, 107; boundary claims and disputes, 10 *et seq.*; Bonapartist régime and, 279; candidates for the throne of, 11; Catholicism of, 189; charity organization laws, 226, 247 *et seq.;* commercial relations suffer, 281; commercial treaty of 1845, 278; condition when Léopold assumed throne, 13 *et seq.;* consternation over fall of French monarchy, 213 *et seq.;* cost of defense, 164; crisis in Chamber over charity laws, 249 *et seq.;* danger from Turco-Egyptian dispute, 266 *et seq.;* debate on Treaty bill, 177 *et seq.;* defensive measures, 298 *et seq.;* delicate position after defeat of 1831, 60 *et seq.;* designs of Louis Napoleon against, 282; diplomatic relations with Prussia and Austria ruptured, 177; diplomatic situation in 1835, 161; dismembered by Conference of London, 63; dissolution of second Parliament, 102; Dutch situation in 1835, 160; Dutch spies in, 37, 53; English attitude in 1835, 163; formation of, 9 *et seq.;* foreign

relations improve, 130; French-Dutch disagreement, 8 *et seq.;* Government of 1831 organized, 80 *et seq.;* hostility of the European powers, 62; incompetency of national army, 51; independence firmly established, 187; independence recognized, 10; invaded by Dutch army, 44 *et seq.;* jury trial established, 113; legacy laws, 227; legal scruples prevent intervention, 49 *et seq.;* legislation during 1858-64, 295 *et seq.;* made a buffer State, 7; military strength in 1830, 38 *et seq.;* monarchy survives the crisis, 184; negotiations with Holland, 93; neutrality of, 268 *et seq.;* new plan of diplomatic action proposed, 93; new sovereign greeted, 20 *et seq.;* octroi abolished, 296; Orangist intrigues, 18; political activities of 1831, 65; political jealousies after 1831 campaign, 57 *et seq.;* Provisional Government formed, 9; public measures of 1847 ministry, 225; railroad and provincial laws adopted, 111, 112; relations with France, 278; regency established, 12; religion's status, 192; religious discord, 8; retains Limburg and Luxemburg, 104; revolutionary period ended, 187; riots of 1830, 8; rupture with Conference of London imminent, 91; saved by French intervention, 51; selection of first king, 11 *et seq.;* Socialism appears, 215; State and Church relations, 208 *et seq.;* territorial stipulations, 164; treaty bill passed, 182; unprepared for war, 39
Belliard, General, 15, 19, 32, 44, 54, 125
Benedetti and Bismarck, 282
Berten, General, Minister of War, 294
Beverloo, army camp, 160
Beyens, Baron, 282, 303, 321
Bismarck and Benedetti, 282
Blanc, Louis, 214
Bonaparte, Napoleon, and Belgium, 7; comments on Léopold, 3
Bonapartist régime and Belgium, 279
Bowring, Sir John, 149
Brabant, Duchess of, 321
Brabant, Duke of, 283, 284, 301, 302, 323
Briey, Count de, 197, 276
Brouckere, Charles de, 43, 50, 64, 82, 85, 90, 230, 231, 281, 284
Brouckere, Henri de, 84, 309
Bruges, Léopold at, 23, 240
Brussels, celebrates 25th anniversary of Léopold's coronation, 237; open to attack, 39; Orangist riots of 1834, 115; panic after Dutch victories, 50
Budget debate of 1841, 197
Buffin, Camille, Baron, 3 *note*
Buol, Count de, 257
Bureaux de bienfaisance, 227, 247
Buzen, General, Minister of War, 195

Cabinet of 1835, 159
Cambridge, Duke of, 283
Campagne de Belgique, La, Col. Huyberecht, 53
Campaign of 1831, 37 *et seq.*
Campine, estate at, 137
Canning, Earl, 16
Capiaumont, General, 52
Castlereagh, Viscount, 7, 16
Catholic Church, bill relative to legal status, 308; Léopold's sympathy for, 207 *et seq.*; position of, 130; reluctant to have papal representative, 208
Catholic feeling intense in Ghent, 24
Catholic party, 71, 109, 110, 296; in 1855 ministry, 235; offended by Léopold, 261; meaning of "liberty" to, 188 *et seq.;* policies of, 189 *et seq.*
Catholicism *vs.* Liberalism, 235
Catholics *vs.* anti-Catholics, 133
Cavaignac, General, 215
Cavour, Count Camillo, 292
Chamber of Requests, 90 *note*

Charities, Catholic and non-Catholic, 249
Charity laws, 226, 247, 250 *et seq.*
Charles V, 6
Charles the Bold, 6
Charles, Prince of Naples, candidate for Belgian throne, 11
Charlotte, Princess, of Belgium, 53, 54, 139, 151, 155, 157, 207, 302, 305
Charlotte, Princess, of England, 4, 5, 13, 154, 155
Chassé, General, 44
Chasteleer, Marquis de, 20
Château d'Ardenne, Léopold at, 242
Château de Vonèche, 242
Château of Compiègne, 128, 146
Chazal, General, Minister of War, 294, 298, 299, 302, 317, 318
Chimay, Prince de, 231, 283
Chokier, Baron Surlet de, 12, 26, 29, 40
Cockerill, John, 65
Coghen, Minister of Finance, 82
Commercial relations in 1853, 281
Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx, 215
Conference of London, 10, 63, 77, 91, 101, 167
Congress of Vienna, 7
Conscience, Henry, 241
Constantine, Grand-Duke, 4
Convention des forteresses, La, F. de Lannoy, 60 *note*
Conway, Edward, Viscount de, 123, 136, 208, 209, 254, 268, 315, 320
Corti, Egon Caesar, 107, 108 *note,* 313
Council of Ministers, hesitating methods of, 43 *et seq.*
Courrier des Pays-Bas, 70, 124
Court of Accounts, 134
Crisis of 1848, 223
Crown prerogatives defined by Lebeau, 101
Cuvelier, Canon de, 71

Daine, General, 34, 35, 40, 44 *et seq.,* 52
De Brouckere ministry, 229 *et seq.,* 281
De Decker, Pierre, 232 *et seq.,* 252, 253, 258, 261
De Decker cabinet formed, 232; struggles with charity bill, 247 *et seq.*
Dechamps, Adolphe, 257, 259, 296, 299, 305, 308, 309, 322, 324
Dechamps, Father, 158
Demer, diplomatic struggle over the, 162
Desprez, General, 64; made Chief of Staff, 86
Destouvelles, M., 78
De Theux ministry retires, 194
Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung, 216
Deveaux, Jules, 84, 98, 118, 136, 178, 179, 196, 201, 234, 282
Diest captured by the Dutch, 48; fortifications at, 162
Dietrichstein, Count, 107, 108
Discailles, 259
Dismemberment conflicts, 165 *et seq.*
Dissolution of Parliament, 99-102
Doignon, M., 110
Du Bus, M., 110
Du Gouvernement représentatif en Belgique, Van den Peereboom, 89 *note*
Dumortier, Barthélemy, 84, 178, 205
Durham, Lord, 43, 125
Duvivier, General, 20

Education; debates over school system, 193 *et seq.;* lay control established, 194
Edward, Prince of Wales, 304
Eenens, General, 52
Elections, of 1831, 68 *et seq.;* of 1833, 104 *et seq.;* of 1847, 205; of 1852, 229; of 1854, 232; of 1857, 294; of 1858, 258; of 1863, 309
Electors, qualification of, 69
Engels, Socialist, 216
England, agrees to support neutrality of Belgium, 95; appealed to by Léopold, 43; Belgium situation in 1835, 162; disputes with France over Belgian situation,

60; ignores Belgium's appeal, 62; ratifies treaty, 90; suspicious over French influence, 58
Ernst, member of cabinet, 176
Europe, political upheavels of 1848, 214 *et seq.*
European monarchs humiliated, 218
Evain, General, 64, 89, 95, 121
Éventail, L', 143 *note*

Faict, Bishop of Bruges, 318
Faider, Charles, Minister of Justice, 230, 309, 310, 313
Failly, General de, 35, 40 *et seq.*
Fallon, 99, 100
Flanders, Army of, 38
Flanders, Count of, 302
Foere, Abbé de, 23
Foreign complications, 266
Fornari, Internuncio, 172, 208
France, agrees to guarantee neutrality of Belgium, 95; annexation of Nice and Savoy, 30; disputes with England over Belgian situation, 60; expels Dutch from Antwerp, 97, 99; intervention saves Belgium, 51; provisional government of 1848, 214; ratifies treaty, 90; relations with Belgians after 1831 campaign, 57 *et seq.*; revolution of 1848, 213 *et seq.*
Francis II, Emperor, 18, 28
Francis Joseph, Emperor, 289
Franco-Belgian relations, 278
Frederick William IV, 214
Frère-Orban, 191, 207, 213, 218, 225, 230, 248, 250, 294, 298
Fréson, 21 *note*
Furnes greets the new sovereign, 20

Gendebien, Alexander, 84, 180, 181
George III of England, 142
Gérard, Marshal of France, 50, 51, 57, 97
Gerlache, Baron de, 74, 78, 88, 174, 176, 237
German Confederation, hostility of to Belgium, 168
Germany, nationalist movement in, 223
Ghent, hostility of ruling class to Léopold, 23 *et seq.*; Léopold at, 25, 239, 241; Orangist plots, 24; Parliamentary vote of 1831, 75
Ghent, Bishop of, 72
Goblet, General, 93, 94, 97, 102-104, 109, 153, 154, 161, 201
Goethals, General, advises unity of command, 40
Government of 1831 organized, 80 *et seq.*
Greece offers throne to Léopold, 5
Grégoire, 34
Grey, Lord, appealed to by Léopold, 43
Guizot, 249, 255, 256, 264, 272, 278, 316

Hainaut, Count of, 301
Hane, General Count de, 20, 43, 45 *et seq.*
Haussy, August de, Minister of Justice, 226, 227, 228
Histoire de Trois générations, Jacques Bainville, 282 *note*
Holland, attitude of, in 1835, 160; closes the Scheldt, 99; coercive measures against, 97; forced to accept armistice, 104; formation of kingdom of, 7 *et seq.*; Léopold's attitude toward, 290; mobilizes army, 33 *et seq.*; negotiations with, 93; protests the treaty, 33; reprisals against Belgium, 99; repudiates the armistice, 36; King seeks friendship of Belgians, 220
Hoogvorst, Baron de, 20
Huart, Baron de, 176, 199; offered premiership, 195
Hurel, General Baron, 161
Huyberecht, Colonel, 53
Hymans, Paul, 204, 259

Inauguration ceremonies, 27 *et seq.*
Indépendant, L', 101, 106, 123, 144
Independence firmly established, 187

Intervention of the powers asked, 42 *et seq.*
Italy, war with Austria, 289

Jeunesse de Léopold I, La, Camille Buffin, 3 *note*
John, Archduke, of Austria, 131, 132, 158, 288
Jottrand, M., Socialist, 215
Journal des Flandres, 73
Journal de la Province de Liége, 73
Julien, M., 111
Jury trial established, 113
Juste, biographer, 149, 159

Kent, Edward, Duke of, 4, 155
Kohary, Princess, 4

Laeken, palace of, 26 *et seq.,* 140, 202, 209, 251
Lannoy, F. de, 60 *note*
Lanzgweert, burgomaster of Ostend, 21
La Panne, greeting of the new sovereign at, 20
Lardinnois, M., 84
Latour-Maubourg, Count de, 60, 125
"Laws of the convents," 249
Lebeau, Joseph, 12, 14, 21, 23, 26, 27, 32, 41 *et seq.,* 74, 81, 84, 85, 87, 90, 95, 96, 98, 100, 101, 110, 120, 121, 130, 145, 159, 162, 177, 180, 193, 195, 198, 199, 229, 234, 239, 250, 266, 273, 277
Leclercq, Minister of Justice, 87, 91, 195, 229
Ledru-Rollin, French politician, 214
Left-Center ministry, 195
Legacies, laws concerning, 227 *et seq.*
Legaré, H. L., U. S. minister, 152
Lehon, foreign representative, 63, 125, 127, 166, 275
Leiningen, Prince of, 4
Leopold I of Belgium, Egon Caesar Corti, 108 *note*
Léopold I, abdication contemplated, 62; address from throne in 1833, 105; address from throne on Dutch question, 170; address to Flemish burgomasters, 25; addresses clergy of Liége, 35; advice to Queen Victoria, 143; advocates neutrality, 267; advocates peace at Malines, 34; analysis of a constitutional régime, 142; anxiety over dismemberment treaty, 182 *et seq.*; appeals to England, 43; appeals to Louis-Philippe, 43; appeals to Metternich, 270, 271; Ardenne estate acquired, 137; arranges State and Church relations, 209; as a linguist, 148; as an intermediary, 271; asks for intervention of the powers, 43; asks Queen Victoria to intervene, 166; asserts royal authority, 126; at Antwerp, 242; at Bruges, 240; at Brussels on 25th anniversary, 237; at Ghent, 239, 241; at Liége and Mons, 242; at Namur, 242; attitude toward Belgians, 137; toward Frederick William, 286; toward Holland, 290; toward Orangists, 152; toward Unionist ministries, 199; becomes thoroughly Belgian, 135; Belgian acquaintances, 16; bestows Order of Léopold on Napoleon III, 283; birth, 3; calls on Joseph Lebeau for advice, 41 *et seq.*; candidate for Belgian throne, 11 *et seq.*; Catholic coöperation sought, 133; chosen servants of, 135 *et seq.*; circumspection of, 140; combats prejudices against Belgium, 107; commercial treaty of 1845, 278; conflicts with his counselors, 145; considered for chief of German Confederation, 222; considers Luxemburg loss, 167 *et seq.*; considers resistance to dismemberment, 169; correspondence with Archduke John, of Austria, 131; counsels widowed Queen Victoria, 304; court functions, 149; court life, 151; Crimean War, disapproves of, 284; criticizes Gen. de Terhove, 46; cultivates

the favor of Austria, 129; customs union with France, 276; death of, 322; declines throne of Greece, 5 *et seq.*; defeated at Louvain, 49; defends necessity of French aid, 59; deist, 314; description of Louise-Marie, 147; desperate position when Dutch invade, 45; difficulties in forming new cabinet, 99; diplomacy of, 128 *et seq.*; diplomatic problems, 263 *et seq.*; disagreement with Rogier, 306; dismemberment problems, 167 *et seq.*; displeased with Lebeau and Rogier, 121; dissolves First Parliament, 100; distrust of Talleyrand, 61; distrusts Belgian Constitution, 132; early intimacy with courts of Europe, 15 *et seq.*; early life, 4 *et seq.*; effect of his German origin, 286; elected King of Belgians, 12; encourages military preparedness, 273 *et seq.*; English nicknames, 18; escapes criticism for army's defeat, 54 *et seq.*; far-sightedness of, 287; fears of revolution, 216 *et seq.*; forms ministries, 32, 95, 195, 203, 205, 259; Franco-British alliance feared, 284; funeral of, 323; gives first court dinner, 31; greeted at Furnes, 20; grief over death of Louise-Marie, 158; guardian of young nation, 125; hazards of kingship venture, 14; helps form coalition against Napoleon, 4; high ideals, 264; humiliated by campaign of 1831, 55; in Russian Army, 4; inaugural speech, 29; inauguration of, 27 *et seq.*; influence at European courts enhanced, 223; influence increases, 102; inspects Army of the Meuse, 35; international politics, 268; interest in Queen Victoria, 156; journey from Calais to Brussels, 19 *et seq.*; lands at Calais, 15; last days at Château d'Ardenne, 320; last illness, 321; leaves England for Belgium, 14; letter on English situation, 163; letter to Archbishop of Malines, 308; to Archduke John, 288; to De Decker on parliament crisis, 253; to Frère-Orban, 218; to Lebeau, 239; to Prince Metternich, 130, 182, 194, 204; to Nothomb, 240; to Queen Victoria, 134, 138, 139, 183, 200, 211, 216, 266, 280, 285, 286; to Charles Rogier, 210, 274; to Talleyrand, 169; to Thiers, 230, 256, 258, 260; to Van de Meyer, 217; "Lord Palmerston's theme" presented, 93; loses confidence in his cabinet, 92; Louis-Philippe guarantees his honesty, 61; made King of Belgians, 6; maintains large army, 161; manifold duties assumed, 124 *et seq.*; marriage to Princess Charlotte, 4; marriage to Louise-Marie of Orléans, 92, 146 *et seq.*; Masonic affiliation, 315, 322; mixed ministries favored by him, 199; national defense his objective, 297 *et seq.*; "Nestor of Kings," 291; obtains a nuncio from Rome, 208; offends Catholic party, 261; opens Parliament of 1831, 80; opens second session of Parliament, 97; opposes dissolution of the Parliament, 203; organic laws upheld, 225 *et seq.*; parliamentary difficulties in 1841, 198; personal traits, 315 *et seq.*; persuaded against accepting intervention, 50; pique against Talleyrand, 61; plans for fortification of Belgium, 298 *et seq.*; plans for strengthening the monarchy, 153 *et seq.*; pleads for his country after defeat in 1831, 63 *et seq.*; political problems of 1857, 250 *et seq.*; policy toward France, 274; pride in the nation, 219; private life of, 148, 302 *et seq.*; proposes martial law in 1857 crisis, 251 provisional court at Laeken, 27; provincial tour, 150; prudence of,

141; qualifications of a sovereign enumerated by him, 143; received at Bruges, 23; received by the Bishop of Tournai, 231; receives King William III at Liége, 290; receives Prince Napoleon at Brussels, 283; reception at Arlon, 242; at Brussels, 26 *et seq.*; at hostile Ghent, 23 *et seq.*; refuses to dissolve ministry in 1841, 199; refuses to sign bill on education, 111; relations with Napoleon III, 279; reorganizes army, 64; reprimands premier, 126; retains confidence of nation in troublesome times, 174 *et seq.*; reviews Army of the Scheldt, 34; revisits France, 284; rôle in Austro-Italian war, 289; royal policies of, 153 *et seq.*; royal prerogatives threatened, 204; secret of his success, 144; seeks support of foreign newspapers, 144; self-reliance of, 132; sickness of, 302, 317; slight knowledge of Belgium when elected King, 16; statesmanship of, 125; succession considered, 154; supports proposed railroad system, 111; sympathy for the Church, 207; takes Belgian throne, 13 *et seq.*; takes command of the army, 44; talents as a statesman, 245; temporizer, 139 *et seq.*; tires of duties, 211, 233; tours through Belgium, 34 *et seq.*; tours through Luxemburg, 242; twenty-fifth anniversary of accession, 237; understood Napoleon III, 282; unites the divided patriots, 26; urges Belgian cause to England, 170; valued discretion, 143; vigilance demanded by parliamentary system, 141; views on legacy laws, 227 *et seq.*; visited by Prince William of Prussia, 319; visits Napoleon III, 231; visits Queen Victoria, 168; warns De Decker, 258; welcomed at Ostend, 21 *et seq.*; welcomed at Ghent, 25; wins congratulations of the powers, 220

Léopold II, 155, 184

Leuchtenberg, Duke of, candidate for Belgian throne, 11, 19

Liberal Congress of 1847, 205

Liberal ministry of 1847, 206; of 1852, 229 *et seq.*; of 1857, 294 *et seq.*

Liberal party, 71, 109, 110, 189 *et seq.*, 192 *et seq.*, 205

Liedts, Minister of the Interior, 195

Liége, Léopold at, 35, 242; Léopold receives King William III at, 290

Ligne, Prince de, 149, 276, 277

Limburg retained by Belgium, 104; loss of to Belgium, 164 *et seq.*

Loë, Baron de, 92, 129

London Conference of 1830, 10, 63, 77, 91, 101, 167

Louise-Marie of Orléans, 146, 147 *et seq.*, 157, 323.

Louis-Philippe, King of France, 8, 12, 43, 60, 61, 128, 138, 155, 157, 163, 168, 204, 211, 263, 264, 266, 271, 272, 275, 278

Louvain, defeat of, 49

Louvain, University of, 201

Luxemburg, Army of, 39

Luxemburg, Léopold's visit to, 242; loss of to Belgium, 164 *et seq.*

Mainmorte et la charité, La, Frère-Orban, 248

Malines, clergy of, welcome Léopold, 34

Malou, Jules, 296

Maria, Queen of Portugal, 153

Marie-Amélie, Queen of France, 154

Marie-Louise-Victoire of Coburg, 4, 155

Martial law proposed in 1857 crisis, 251

Marx, Karl, 215, 216

Mary, daughter of Charles the Bold, 6

Maxmilian, Archduke, 291, 293, 302
Mehemet Ali, 266, 271
Melbourne, Lord, 138, 166
Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, Comte de Las Cases, 3 *note*
Mémorial, Le, 144
Mercier, Minister of Finance, 195, 201, 258
Merode, Count Félix de, 16, 78, 87, 88, 94, 98, 100, 109, 116, 117, 144, 172, 176, 194, 233
Metternich, Prince, 9, 16, 92, 107, 108, 129, 130, 137, 162, 182, 194, 204, 208, 218, 221, 270, 271, 291
Meuse, Army of the, 39, 45, 47, 48
Military strength of Belgium in 1830, 38 *et seq.*
Ministry, First, 81 *et seq.;* second, 95; of 1832, 118, 121, 122; of 1833, 176; of 1837, 159, 194; of 1840, 195, 196-199; of 1846, 203; of 1847, 206, 225; of 1852, 229, 232; of 1855, 232 *et seq.*; of 1857, 294; of 1858, 259
Ministry, Léopold's first, 32
Ministry, Nothomb's, of 1841, 200, 201
Moniteur, Le, 103, 253, 321
Mons, Léopold at, 240
Muelenaere, de, 49, 60, 81, 85, 87, 91, 92, 99, 122, 159, 203

Namur, Léopold at, 242
Napoleon I (*see* Bonaparte)
Napoleon III, 230, 231, 278, 280, 282, 283 *et seq.*, 298, 317
National Congress dissolved, 68
Nemours, Duke of, 11, 19, 128
Nesselrode, 127, 220
Netherlands, The, division of, 10; united under King William, 7
Neutrality guarantee tested, 42 *et seq.*; guaranteed by powers, 95
Newspaper controversies of 1840, 196
Newspaper support sought by Léopold, 144
Nice and Savoy annexed to France, 301
Nothomb, Baron Alphonse, 29, 81, 90, 98, 109, 112, 176, 178, 200, 208, 212, 240, 247 *et seq.*, 268, 272, 277, 309
Nothomb, J. B., 144

Octroi abolished, 296
Ollevier, Colonel, 20
Orange, Prince of, 4, 11, 37, 39, 44 *et seq.*
Orangist intriques in Belgium, 18, 24, 33, 37, 65, 113, 114
Orangist "manifestation" over Prince of Orange's stud, 115
Orangists, eliminated in election of 1833, 105; intrigues by bill of 1834, 119; Léopold's attitude toward, 152
Orléans, Duke of, 134, 157
Orloff, Prince, 127 *et seq.*
Ostend, 137; welcomes Léopold, 21
Ostend Trading Company, 174
Otho, Prince, candidate for Belgian throne, 11

Palmerston, Lord, 16, 58, 61, 62, 92, 93, 154, 162, 166, 169, 170, 172, 267, 270, 318
Paris, revolution of 1848, 213 *et seq.*
Parliament, second session of, opened by Léopold, 97; second session adjourned, 100
Parliament of 1831, 78-80, 84 *et seq.*; of 1834, 110, 111, 119
Parliamentary crisis over charity laws, 250
Parliamentary election of 1831, 68 *et seq.*
Parliamentary life in early days of independence, 119 *et seq.*
Parliamentary measures passed in 1831, 86 *et seq.*
Parliamentary powers conferred by Constitution, 79
Parliamentary system, 141
Pays Bas, the, 6
Pecci, Mgr., 208, 209
Peel, Robert, 138
Philip the Good, 6

Philippe, Prince, Count of Flanders, 155
Piercot, Minister of the Interior, 230
Pirenne, Henri, appraises Léopold, 3
Political crisis of 1857, 247 *et seq.*
Political parties, 71, 188 *et seq.*
Political upheavals in Europe, 214
Politics, internal, 187 *et seq.*; international, 268
Ponsonby, Lord, 12
Pope Leo XIII, 208, 257
Portugal, King of, 264, 318
Postel, estate of, 137
Praet, Jules van, secretary to Léopold, 14, 16, 117, 135, 140, 141, 170, 203, 209, 213, 226, 252, 254, 268, 272, 305, 306, 308, 321
Press, freedom of, 281
Prince of Orange, candidate for throne of Belgium, 11; commands Dutch army, 37, 39; defeats the Belgians at Corlessem and Louvain, 48 *et seq.*; invades Belgium, 44 *et seq.*
Provincial law of 1834, 111, 112
Prussia, attitude toward Belgium, 107; diplomatic relations ruptured, 177; diplomatic situation in 1835, 161; hostile to Belgium, 62; King corresponds with Léopold, 107; ratifies the Treaty of the XXIV Articles, 90; yields to Belgian neutrality, 105

Raikem, Minister of Justice, 74, 82, 87
Railroad law of 1834, 111
Ram, Mgr. de, 210
Regent's régime, errors of, 125
Revolutionary period ended, 187
Revue des Deux Mondes, 256
Revue Nationale, 196
Risorgimento, the, Léopold's attitude toward, 289
Robaulx, M. de, 87
Rodes, Marquis de, 131
Rogier, Charles, 19, 74, 90, 95, 96, 109, 111, 112, 113, 118, 121, 140, 159, 195, 197, 201, 202, 206, 210, 226, 228, 229, 250, 259, 294, 295, 298, 306 *et seq.*
Rogier, Firmin, 206, 232, 306
Roi Léopold I, Le, Faider, 312 *note*
Rudolph, Archduke, 6
Russia, attitude toward Belgium, 107; diplomatic situation in 1835, 161; hostile to Belgium, 62; ratifies Treaty of the XXIV Articles, 90

Saint-Rombaut, Léopold at, 34
Sauvage, M. de, Minister of the Interior, 20
Saxe-Coburg, Albert, Prince of, 315; Ernest, Prince of, 315; Ferdinand, Prince of, 4; Julienne, Princess, 4; Marie-Louise-Victoire, Princess, 4, 155
Scheldt, Army of the, 39, 45, 47, 49
Scheldt, the, closed by Holland, 99; freedom of the, 160; freedom purchased, 296
Schools, attempt to establish ecclesiastical authority in, 194; free *vs.* parochial, 193 *et seq.*
Seton, Sir Harry, 43
Seymour, Sir Henry, 172, 173
Skrzynecki, General, 176, 177
Socialism, advent of, 215
Solferino, Battle of, 289
Souvenirs personnels de Joseph Lebeau, Fréson, 21 *note*
Stein, Heinrich, 16
Sterckx, Cardinal, 209
Stockmar, Baron, 17, 62, 63, 92, 138, 145, 149, 211, 243, 246, 255, 261, 287, 304
Surlet, Regent of Belgium, 12, 124

Talleyrand, Prince, 15, 18, 58, 60, 61, 128, 154, 169
Terbeco, Huyttens de, 28 *note*
Terhove, General de Tieken de, 33, 34, 39, 46 *et seq.*
Territorial stipulations, 164
Tesch, Minister of Justice, 294
Tielemans, 235
Times, The, 144

Theux, Count de, 69, 83, 99, 100, 121, 126, 145, 159, 166, 171, 172, 173, 176, 177, 194
Thiers, Louis A., 134, 141, 142, 230, 255, 256, 258, 259, 260, 265, 266, 271, 272, 275, 280, 287, 292, 308
Thonissen, 52
Todleben, General, 299
Tournai, Bishop of, 31
Treason charge after Dutch war, 52 *et seq.*
Treaty bill of 1835, debate on, 177 *et seq.*
Treaty, commercial, of 1845, 278
Treaty of 1833 accepted by Belgium, 105
Treaty of the XVIII Articles, 10, 13, 57, 77, 80
Treaty of the XXIV Articles, 11, 63, 64, 80, 161; accepted by Holland, 163 *et seq.*; ratified by European powers, 90
Treaty of Villafranca, 298
Turco-Egyptian dispute, 266

Unionism, final defeat of, 206; political, advantages of, 235 *et seq.*
Unionist ministries of 1841 and 1842, 200, 201

Van Coeckelberg, 20
Van den Peereboom, 307
Van Doorn, 34
Van de Velde, Mgr., Bishop of Ghent, 22
Van de Weyer, Sylvian, 16, 62, 63, 91, 92, 94, 102, 116, 117, 144, 162, 163, 168, 169, 201, 202, 217, 243, 268
Verhaegen offered premiership, 229
Victoria, Queen of England, 4, 134, 138, 139, 143, 155, 156, 166, 183, 200, 211, 216, 220, 266, 271, 280, 284, 291, 303, 304, 318, 323
Vie politique des Belges, E. de Beaulieu, 120 *note*
Vienna, Congress of, 7
Villafranca, Treaty of, 298
Villa Julia on Lake Como, 149
Vrière, Baron de, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 294

Waleski, Count, 283
War with the Dutch, 41 *et seq.*
Wauthier, General de, 20
Wellington, Duke of, 7, 16
William of Orange-Nassau, 7 *et seq.*
William the Silent, 6
William I, King of Holland, 33, 93, 104, 114, 127, 128, 150, 160, 163 *et seq.*
William IV of England, 156
William, Prince of Prussia, 319
Willmar, General, 176
Woeste, 261, 297
Woyna, Count de, 268

Zonhoven, military convention of, 106